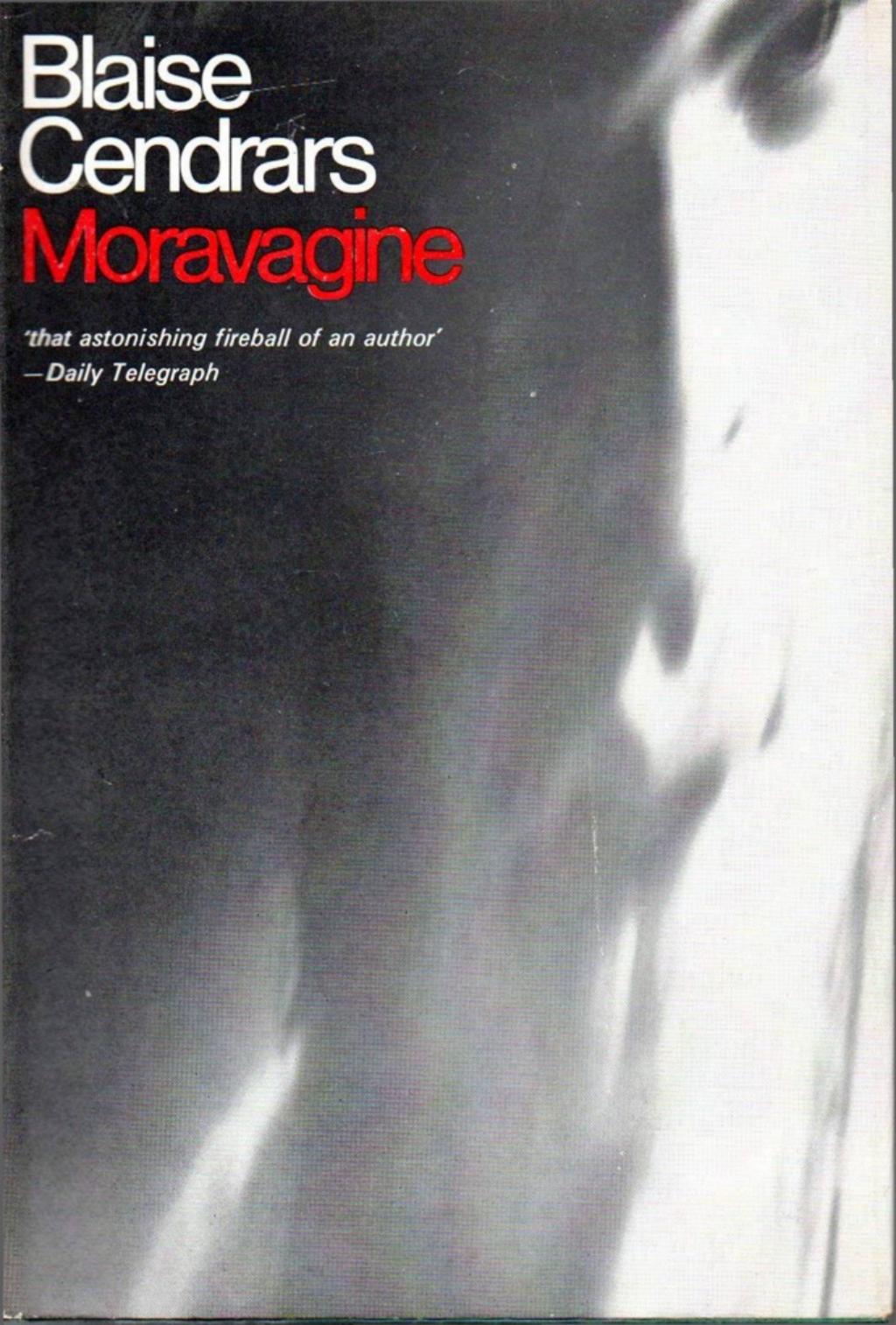


Blaise Cendrars **Moravagine**

'that astonishing fireball of an author'

—Daily Telegraph



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

To the End of the World

Blaise Cendrars

MORAVAGINE

A novel, translated from the French by
Alan Brown



Peter Owen · London

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Translated from the French
Moravagine

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. . . I shall demonstrate how this tiny sound within, this nothing, contains everything; and how, with the bacillary aid of a single sensation —always the same one, and deformed at that in its very origins—a brain isolated from the world can create a world for itself . . .

Remy de Gourmont, *Sixtine*

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Preface

When one has travelled among many countries and books and men, one feels at times the need to settle down for once.

For twelve years I lived at 4, rue de Savoie, Paris VI; but I have always had, and still have, several other domiciles in France and abroad. Number 4, rue de Savoie served as a kind of storehouse : I would arrive there between trains, between boats, and empty my suitcases or drop someone off, or consult a book. Each time I left in a rush, my head busy but my heart and hands free

In the Isle de France country there is an old steeple. Below the steeple, a little house. In this house, an attic under lock and key. Behind the locked door, a trunk with a secret compartment. In the false bottom there is a Pravaz syringe; in the trunk itself, manuscripts. The syringe, the manuscripts, the trunk were left behind by a prisoner, a prisoner in Spain; but I am not a victim of the famous swindle of the Spanish prisoner's trunk.

The syringe is no longer sharp. The manuscripts are in a frightful state. They constitute the works of Moravagine. But the trunk was left with me by . . . by . . . by the Spanish prisoner, God's truth, and I must not reveal his name

I will not go on with this Preface, for the present book itself is a preface, a too-long preface to the *Complete Works of Moravagine* which I shall publish one day, but which I have not yet had time to put in order. This is why the manuscripts will continue to lie in the trunk with the false bottom, the trunk in the attic, the attic under lock and key,

in the little house, at the foot of the old steeple, in a little village in the Isle de France, until I, Blaise Cendrars, no longer prowl about the world among the many lands and books and men.

As for lands, there are lands enough. As for books, here is one. As for men, I know so many and then some, and I never grow tired of meeting more; but never have I met a man as tough and as near to my heart as this poor chap who wrote me the following letter a spring or so ago. (I was in Brazil, in a fazenda near Santa Veridiana, and when I read it all grew dark around me, the blue tropical sky, the red South American earth; and the life I was leading in this wild place, in the company of my horse Canari and my dog Sandy, suddenly seemed to me meaningless and paltry, and I hurried back to Europe. A man had just died, within four walls, at dawn, an iron collar around his neck, garrotted, his tongue protruding . . . as in a Goya print . . .)

2 o'clock in the morning.

The death cell,
Monjuic, 11th May, 1924.
Cell number 7.

My dear Blaise Cendrars,

I knew that if I asked it of you, you would do the impossible to obtain my release from the King of Spain, the release of being executed at once.

You succeeded, you did me this difficult favour, I shall be executed at dawn, and I thank you, thank you with all my heart.

A grandee of Spain (such is the custom here) keeps me company tonight in my cell. He trembles and prays, he trembles and prays; he prays; he trembles. He is a charming fellow such as one meets at golf in England or elsewhere, he is most surprised to discover that I don't inspire him with horror—I mean with physical re-

vulsion: for he must have expected to encounter some kind of monster in my cell (just think, a regicide!) and he is astonished to find that I am not some anarchist abortion or a pasty-faced suburban thug as we are usually depicted in films. I noticed the face he made when he saw my missing leg. I explained to him that it was a wound from the war; and then we talked war for a while, politely, nicely, as if we were sitting in our club, and for a good fifteen minutes he forgot why he was there

The time is drawing near. My young Spanish grandee in his court dress is kneeling on a *prie-dieu*. He is no longer trembling. He's praying . . . praying How grateful I am that he is here . . . polite, deeply moved, devout, well scrubbed (his head is well greased, and his blond hair is carefully parted in the middle in an impeccably straight line) . . . how grateful I am that he spent an hour grooming himself before coming here . . . he smells of the latest perfume, from the House of It's more pleasant, really, than having to put up with the chaplain or the gaoler or the last of a series of brutal guards I won't see the executioner's face, from under my cowl I shall see nothing

Thank you. Here's a last handshake. And my embrace. Do as you like with the papers—you know the ones I mean.

Adieu.

R.

And now, as a name is really quite essential if one is to understand this book, let's say that 'R.' is . . . let's say . . . let's say it stands for RAYMOND LA SCIENCE.

Blaise Cendrars

La Mimoseraié
April/November 1925

I THE SPIRIT OF AN AGE

(a) Internship

In 1900 I completed my medical studies. I left Paris in August to go to the Waldensee Sanatorium, near Berne in Switzerland. My master and friend, Professor d'Entraigues, famous for his publications on syphilis, had given me a warm recommendation to Dr Stein, the director, to whom I was to be chief assistant.

Stein and his establishment were well known at the time.

Freshly honed by the faculty and enjoying a certain favourable notoriety, which my thesis on the chemistry of deranged states of the subconscious had earned for me in specialist circles, I was impatient to shake off the yoke of schools and deal a resounding blow to official teachings.

Every young doctor has gone through this stage.

I had, accordingly, specialized in the study of the so-called 'diseases' of the will and, to be more exact, nervous troubles, obvious tics, habits common to every living human, caused by the phenomena of that congenital state of hallucination which is, in my opinion, the continuous and irradiating activity of consciousness. This study, with its many aspects touching on the most burning problems of medicine, of science, of metaphysics, with all its exigencies of precise observation, of patient reading and general knowledge, of ready judgment and sensitivity, of consistency and logic in one's ideas, of a sense of correlations, of an intuitive mind, with the vast and brilliant field it opens to an impulsive and clairvoyant intelligence, was able like no other to satisfy a character as ambitious

and mercenary as my own and open the way to rapid and spectacular success. I counted heavily, moreover, on my talent in dialectics and on . . . hysteria.

Hysteria, the Great Hysteria, was then much in fashion in medical circles. Following the preliminary work of the schools of Montpellier and la Salpêtrière, which had, so to speak, done no more than define and situate the object of their studies, a number of foreign men of science, particularly the Austrian, Freud, had taken up the problem, had gone into it more amply, more profoundly, had lifted it, extracted it from its purely experimental and clinical domain to make of it a kind of pataphysics of social, religious and artistic pathology, in which it was not so much a question of coming to know the climacteric of this or that obsession born spontaneously in the farthest regions of consciousness and determining the simultaneity of the 'auto-vibism' of sensations observed in the subject, but rather of creating, of forging an entire system of sentimental (supposedly rational) symbolism of acquired or innate slips of the subconscious, a kind of key to dreams for use by psychiatrists, as codified by Freud in his works on psycho-analysis, which Dr Stein was, as it happened, just putting into practice for the first time in his highly fashionable sanatorium in Waldensee.

As a special branch of general philosophy, pathogenesis had never been explored. In my opinion it had never been approached in a strictly scientific fashion—that is to say, objectively, amorally, intellectually.

All those who have written on the subject are filled with prejudice. Before searching out and examining the mechanism of causes of disease, they treat of 'disease as such', condemn it as an exceptional and harmful condition, and start out by detailing the thousand and one ways of combating it, disturbing it, destroying it; they define health, for this purpose, as a 'normal' condition that is absolute and immutable.

Diseases *are*. We do not make or unmake them at will.

We are not their masters. They make us, they form us. They may even have created us. They belong to this state of activity which we call life. They may be its main activity. They are one of the many manifestations of universal matter. They may be the principal manifestation of that matter which we will never be able to study except through the phenomena of relationships and analogies. Diseases are a transitory, intermediary, future state of health. It may be that they are health itself.

Coming to a diagnosis is, in a way, casting a physiological horoscope.

What convention calls health is, after all, no more than this or that passing aspect of a morbid condition, frozen into an abstraction, a special case already experienced, recognized, defined, finite, extracted and generalized for everybody's use. Just as a word only finds its way into the *Dictionary of the French Academy* when it is well worn, stripped of the freshness of its popular origin or of the elegance of its poetic value, often more than fifty years after its creation (the last edition of the learned *Dictionary* is dated 1878), just as the definition given preserves a word, embalms it in its decrepitude, but in a pose which is noble, hypocritical and arbitrary—a pose it never assumed in the days of its vogue, while it was still topical, living and meaningful—so it is that health, recognized as a public Good, is only the sad mimic of some illness which has grown unfashionable, ridiculous and static, a solemnly doddering phenomenon which manages somehow to stand on its feet between the helping hands of its admirers, smiling at them with its false teeth. A commonplace, a physiological cliché, it is a dead thing. And it may be that health is death itself.

Epidemics, and even more diseases of the will or collective neuroses, mark off the different epochs of human evolution, just as tellurian cataclysms mark the history of our planet. In all this lies an elementary, complicated chemistry which has not yet been studied.

Learned and all as they are, the doctors of today are not *physicians* (as they are called in English). They are drifting farther and farther from the study and observation of nature. They have forgotten that science must remain a kind of edification which is subject to the limitations of our spiritual antennae.

'Prophylaxis! Prophylaxis! . . .' they cry; and to save face they ruin the future of the species.

In the name of what law, of what morality, of what society are they allowed to rage on? They intern, sequester, isolate the most striking individuals. They mutilate our physiological geniuses, the bearers and forerunners of the health of tomorrow. Proudly they term themselves princes of science, and, suffering from persecution mania, assume the easy posture of the victim. Obscure and obscurantist, they dress their language in tatters of Greek and, rigged out thus grotesquely, insinuate themselves everywhere in the name of a rational shopkeeper's liberalism. As for their theories—hippomammary droppings. They have made themselves tools of a vulgar bourgeois virtue that was formerly the monopoly of bigots; they have put their science at the service of state police forces and organized the destruction of all that is most deeply idealistic (i.e. independent). They castrate for crimes of passion and even take their knives to the lobes of the brain. Senile, impotent eugenists, they imagine they can extirpate all evil. Their vanity is equalled only by their rascality, and hypocrisy is the only check on their levelling rage, their hypocrisy, their concupiscence.

Just look at the alienists. They have made themselves lackeys of the rich man's crime. On the model of Sodom and Gomorrah they have set up their topsy-turvy heavens; they have built bordello-like retreats where only banknotes cause the doors to open, whose sesame is gold. There, all is arranged to maintain and encourage the rarest of vices. There, the most refined of sciences panders to disordered and maniac minds whose sybaritism is of a complexity so

frighteningly modern that the crotchets of a Ludwig II of Bavaria or a Marquis de Sade seem like pretty games. There, crime is the rule. Nothing is monstrous or contrary to nature. All that is human is alien to it. The prothesis functions in rubbery silence. Rectums of silver are inserted, and vulvae of chromed leather. The last of the egalitarian communards, the Drs Guillotin, make cynical incisions in aristocratic lower backs and loins. They have appointed themselves spiritual directors of the spinal fluid, and practise coldly the laparatomy of consciences. They make forcible use of ether, opium, morphine and cocaine, and force is there, regardless of whether it is used to restrict or push up the dosage. All is based on a ready-reckoner established according to unshakeable statistics. They work out combinations of douches and poisons; they calculate nervous prostration against heightened sensitivity. History has never known such a secret society of spoilers and ravagers; what is told of the Inquisition and the Jesuits does not approach their virtuosity in the art of exploiting the blemishes of escutcheoned families. And these are the hands to which today's society has been confided ! And these are the hands that shape our society of tomorrow !

And this is the point to which I have been coming : I wanted to draw up a terrible accusation against these psychiatrists, expose their psychology, circumscribe and define their misshapen professional conscience, destroy their power and deliver them up to public obloquy.

For my purposes I could have found no better place than the celebrated house of Waldensee.

(b) An International Sanatorium

Doctor Stein had arrived at the apogee of his fame.

He was a tall and powerfully built man, always dressed in new clothes. A good talker, an indefatigable speech-maker, he wore a bushy, carefully trimmed beard which gave further weight to his already bulky form. He lived exclusively on curds of milk, steamed rice and buttered bananas. Strongly drawn to women, his unctuous manners concealed a brutal sexuality which was betrayed by his flat feet, his spatulate finger-nails, his fixed stare and his frozen smile. The backs of his fingers were hairy.

Man of science, man of the world, a fanatic for gymnastics, he made the rounds of all those international congresses where a domesticated science is chewed and chewed over again, always escorted by one of the teams of model male-nurse attendants who accompanied him everywhere and under his personal coaching carried off all the first prizes in gymnastic competitions : perfect athletes, walking advertisements, the pride and speciality of his Home, the incarnation and gratuitous proof of the pre-eminence of his method.

Unflagging in his propaganda, he wrote tirelessly. Each year he published a great volume filled with gobbledegook which was translated at once into every possible language. Innumerable newspaper articles had made his name a byword. It was he who launched those first popular studies on the question of sex which, a few years later, were to inundate the world with a flood of ribaldry and protest. Already the initiator of the health-dress and hygienic camel-hair underwear, this Volapük of the kitchen

was also the advocate of cooking 'everything in the casserole'.

Stein loved money. His avidity for gain was proverbial. Without the slightest scruple he had sequestered his wife, a rich Rumanian Jewess, misshapen and humpbacked, who had brought him a dowry of a few million. It was said that between them he and the Kaiser held all the shares of the Grand Theatre of Berlin, and that Stein had bought out all the Levantine bordellos on the Mediterranean, from Constantinople to Alexandria.

Stein was the personal friend of several heads of state. He enlisted his pimps from the upper-class racketeers of the diplomatic world : spies, counter-spies, embassy detectives. His clientele was composed of that strange society, half-degenerate, half-indolent, a trifle arrogant and much given to merriment, that frequents the none-too-exclusive salons of Rome, the spas, gaming tables and international *hotels de luxe* in the centre of Paris, whose patrimony consists of a set of suitcases, a season-ticket to the *wagons-lit*, a multi-coloured sheaf of pawn-tickets, a collection of unpaid bills, and the possibility, all else failing, of a music-hall engagement. Extravagant Russian princes, lapidary American females who scour the world in search of the ideal piano-player, gentlemen of the Danube, complicated and alluring young German millionaires, the odd authentic margrave, the occasional authentic Scottish *Adélaïde*, ageless and ferociously sentimental : this whole little world turned up sooner or later in his practice, some to rest, others to indulge themselves, and all to flee their everyday cares by surrendering wholly to the Master's healing attentions. And Stein paraded, perorated, gave advice, issued orders, and indefatigably abused and amused his creatures.

Half-way up a little hill that dominates Lake M . . . the six hundred windows of the Kurhaus opened to the sun. There, all was calculated to embellish the most luxurious kind of comfort. Everything was new and shining, and in

a taste which, though doubtful, was none the less pleasing. Complete freedom was given the guests of the sanatorium in their comings and goings. Those who lived in could take excursions in the country, going as far as Berne or even Interlaken. The roads were dotted with strange, distinguished couples escorted at a distance by dim-witted clod-hoppers whose herculean forms bulged under their thin alpaca jackets. Several acres of park surrounded the Institute, studded with luxurious, tiny villas where at times dark dramas were enacted and frightful orgies celebrated before the unflinching gaze of the guards.

A delicate, chromed and exquisitely fine piece of machinery had found its way into this ark of vice. Domesticated, seldom ferocious, supple and silent, it went from one to the other, bending and adapting itself to their slightest whims, flattering the slightest appetite of their senses. It made life and its functions so easy and functioned so seductively that many 'patients' could not make up their minds to end their stay, charmed as they were by the stimulation and entertainment it provided.

But behind this brilliant façade, behind the frosted glass of this hothouse where the too-fortunate of the earth flourished and thrrove, humid with well-being, behind the natty and artificial décor a tragic discipline made itself felt, the iron schedule that like a cruel geometry rules the days of the deranged and mad. It was to be glimpsed in the flagrant regimentation of the garden landscapes, in the systematic arrangement of the rooms, in the peculiar composition of the meals, in the thousand and one distractions offered to the senses, and it filled the air like a subtle and traitorous perfume, the perfume of espionage. Nothing could resist this presence; one fell prey to it without knowing; it impregnated one's life, soul, brain and heart, and quickly broke down the most hardened will.

At the rear of the park stood the red buildings of an English Farmhouse done in the style of a racing stable. It was there that the incurable billionaires, kept in escape-

proof box-stalls and pampered by the most lavish attentions, sat out their long wait for death.

Thanks to his exceptional situation as a member of the fashionable world, Dr Stein was the holder of numerous state secrets; and if he had been willing to do so for as much as one hour, he could have said much concerning the tragic events that left their bloody stain upon the court of Austria. But his inexhaustible flood of words never contained the slightest revelation, nor did the wisteria that bloomed against the façade of the English Farmhouse give any hint that this rustic retreat was indeed a state prison.

Stein had no suspicion of the intruder that he had allowed into his establishment, nor of my dark designs.

Our relationship was made clear from the start. I was to make my report to him each morning at four o'clock, while he, stark naked, performed his quarter-hour of Swedish exercises squatting on the parquet floor of his room. Then I saw no more of him all day; I hurried directly about my work, overseeing the starting-up of the heating plant and other machinery. At seven the rounds of the wards began, lasting until one. A scanty lunch was then served me in my apartment. From three to five in the afternoon I had free access to the library, which was installed in one of the villas in the park. My particular duties allowed me a key to the case-history files: I forgot to mention that I had been put in charge of the out-buildings that made up the English Farm. In the evening, after a final tour of inspection, I myself prepared the potions and sedatives.

'After three months with the incurables your main assignment will be to assist in my personal sessions of analysis,' Stein had said to me at the end of our interview. 'They require enormous tact. This will be a marvellous apprenticeship for you. In six months I shall name you father-confessor to one of my most cherished in-patients. She is afflicted with the phobia of scruples, a moral delirium of

the sense of touch, and she will provide you with a splendid initiation into our subject-matter.'

Thus, I was my own master. This was my fondest desire. I could continue my work on pathogenic chemistry. I could do my research on the spot, and prepare at leisure the pamphlet which I intended for the eyes of the most brilliant society and for my colleagues in other specialized fields.

A secret ardour spurred me on and allowed me to rise above the failings of my physical health, which had been impoverished by ten years of privation and intellectual strain in Paris.

I have already said that the activity of consciousness is a congenital hallucination. Our origins being aqueous, our life is the perpetual rhythm of tepid waters. We have water in our stomachs and in our ears. We perceive the rhythm of the universe through the peritoneum, which is our cosmic tympanum, a collective sense of touch. Of our individual senses the first in rank is our hearing, which perceives the rhythm of our own particular and individual life. This is why all diseases begin with auditory troubles which are, like the manifestations of marine life, keys to the past and precursors of an inexhaustible process of becoming. It was, therefore, none of my business as a doctor to attempt to hinder such manifestations. I envisaged, rather, the possibility of multiplying these tonic accidents and achieving, through a prodigious subversion, the perfect accord of a new harmony. The future.

I should have liked to open all cages, all zoos, all prisons, all lunatic asylums, see the great wild ones liberated, and study the development of an unheard-of kind of human life. And if I later abandoned my Machiavellian plans for struggle and worldly success, if I turned away from my career, if I deliberately renounced the glory that my first writings already promised me, it was because I met, in the course of my duties at the English Farm, the superb creature who was to lead me to a grandstand seat at

a tremendous spectacle of revolution and transformation,
the transvaluation of all social values and of life itself.

I let an incurable escape.

But that is a story in itself, the story of a friendship.

(c) Case Histories and Files

I had arrived during the morning, and I spent part of the afternoon settling into my little apartment, which was on the second floor in the central wing of the English Farm, charmingly decorated as a jockey's or perhaps a trainer's quarters. My dinner was served at six precisely, as I had asked; then I went to bed, wanting to be in form for the next day.

Before going to sleep I went through the notes and files relating to my department. They had been left on my night table for the purpose. I had seventeen in-patients. All incurable. So far as one could see from the notes, classic cases of madness, nothing special about them. Quite everyday in all respects. I went to sleep in a mood of disappointment. The next day I began my duties.

I went to report to Stein that I had studied the notes and files. Then I made a tour of the mechanical installations. These were truly a model of their kind. Hydraulic, electronic apparatus, the paraphernalia of mechano-therapy, bowls, phials, test-tubes, angle-tubes of glass, of rubber, of copper; steel springs, enamelled pedals, white levers, water-taps, everything shining, everything furbished, polished, meticulously, pitilessly clean. On the walls, nozzles racked up in pan-flute series glowed like a menacing show of weapons, and on the plate-glass tables and trays were other weapons, carefully laid out, smaller and more mysterious, irregular and elliptical forms, discs and balls, the keys to anaesthetic massage. On the white tiles of the wards the bathtubs, ergometers and immense percolators appeared as if on a screen, with the same terrible and

savage grandeur that objects have in films: a grandeur of intensity, which is also the scale on which we measure Indian masks and primitive fetishes, expressions of latent activity—the egg!—the frightening sum of permanent energy contained in every inanimate object.

The employees of the place were styled to match. The chemist pulled on his gloves with reverence; in his gutta-percha cabin the electrician started up his motor; the urinalysis proceeded like a ritual; thermometers were shaken, the mercury dropped to zero. Simultaneously throughout the establishment the day shift moved in to replace the night shift. Napkins were spread out and instrument cases emptied of their contents. The door of the poison cupboard received its key. A chair appeared. A rocking-chair. And even some sort of musical instrument unfolded slowly out of nowhere. Everything happened silently, according to a pre-established and deliberate rhythm, a strict and ruthless discipline, a Prussian exactitude which ruled everything down to the most minute details, leaving nothing whatever to chance.

An internal police force, a corps of trained attendants who reported only to Stein himself, ensured in military fashion the smooth unfolding of each day's routine.

On the stroke of seven I began my rounds, accompanied by two male nurses and a squad of bodyguards in uniform who actually seemed to have me too under surveillance.

This was normal procedure, and it was the senior guard who kept the ring of keys and opened the doors to the apartments. I made the acquaintance of my seventeen patients, going quickly from one to the other. There was nothing remarkable about them. In any case, as I said before, this *kind* of patient was not what interested me. I was about to go back up to my quarters, in a rather pettish humour, for my department promised to be nothing but drudgery, when the senior guard respectfully drew my attention to the fact that I was omitting a call.

'What?' I said, astonished. 'I have seventeen patients,

and I've seen them all!'

'There is still number 1731 in the annexe.'

'Number 1731? I have no file on him.'

'But he is one of your patients.'

And, to support what he said, the senior guard pointed to a card which he held out for me to see. Paragraph 2 of the daily orders read: . . . *see that patient 1731 is visited by the duty doctor of the English Farm.*

He led me across the courtyard to a lodge that I had not noticed before. In a walled garden nestled a delightful cottage, consisting of a main building and a large glassed-in hall which could serve as a studio. And here lived number 1731.

I go in.

A small, wretched-looking man is there, sitting in a corner. His pants are down. He is in the process of gratifying himself morosely. Something white spurts from his hand and falls in a glass bowl placed between his thighs. In the bowl a red fish is swimming. Having finished his little business he stands and arranges his clothes, gazing seriously at me the while. A clown, one might think. He stands planted there, his legs apart, swaying a little back and forth as if he were slightly dizzy. He is a dark little man, skinny, knotted and desiccated as a vine-stock, seemingly burned by the flame that flickers in the depths of his great eyes. His forehead is low. His eye-sockets deep. The circles beneath his eyes almost touch the creases about his mouth. His right leg, the knee afflicted with ankylosis, forms a right angle, and he limps terribly. His hands dangle at the ends of arms as long as a monkey's.

And suddenly he begins to speak, not volubly at all, but slowly, collectedly. His voice, low and warm like that of a female alto, leaves me stupefied. Never in my life had I heard a voice with such prolonged echoes, such gravity, such sliding tones of sexual melancholy, with its passionate surges, with all the lower registers of joy. This voice seemed to me to give off colours, so filled was it with voluptuous

elation. It possessed me completely. I at once felt an irresistible liking for this tragic and singular little effigy who dragged himself along within his iridescent voice like a caterpillar in its own skin.

When I left him I ran to consult the files.

Card # 1731. MORAVAGINE. Tennis teacher. Admitted 12th June, 1894. Had the annexe-lodge of the English Farm built at his own expense. Description : Hair, black; eyes, dark; forehead, low; nose, normal; face, long; height, 4 ft. 11 in.; distinguishing marks, ankylosis of right knee, right leg shortened by 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. For civil status and diagnosis, consult secret file # 110 under the name G . . . y.

Secret file number 110 did not exist as such. A simple sheet of blue paper bore this handwritten note :

1731. G . . . y. In case of death, send telegram to Austrian embassy.

I could find no trace of a diagnosis. It had probably never been established.

I asked Stein about it.

Stein listened to me, but gave no additional explanation.

All this left me in the dark. My curiosity was aroused. The host of irregularities which I suspected to have been committed in Moravagine's case only enlivened the sympathy I felt for this poor devil. From that moment I devoted all my time to him, neglecting my other patients to spend long hours conversing with him. He was gentle, very calm, very cool, disillusioned and blasé. He knew nothing of life, and showed no resentment towards the men who had had him put away, nor towards those who supervised his confinement. He was alone. He had always been alone, within four walls, behind grilles and bars, with his pride, his scorn, his grandeur. He knew that he was a great man. He knew his own power.

The head guard took a jaundiced view of our colloquies. He made reports. Stein called me in several times, trying to

put an end to our meetings, insisting that I have nothing more to do with Moravagine. I paid no attention to him. This was a friendship. Moravagine and I were inseparable.

I owed it to myself to see to his escape.

THE LIFE OF MORAVAGNE, AN IDIOT

(d) His Origins—His Childhood

This is what Moravagine told me of his origins and his childhood during the long conversations that preceded his escape.

'I am the last scion of the powerful house of G . . . y, the sole authentic descendant of the last King of Hungary. On 16th August, 1866, my father was found assassinated in his bath. My mother, in an attack of convulsions, miscarried, and there was I in this world three months too soon by the castle clock, which was just striking midday.

'I passed the first hundred days of my life in an over-heated incubator, where the most prodigious care was lavished on me—as it has wherever I've been, instilling in me a perfect horror of women and sentimentality. Later, in the castle of Fejervar, and in the prison at Pressburg, and here in my Waldensee lodge, servants, soldiers, wardens have lavished on me the same kind of care without weakening my will. All in the name of the Emperor, of Justice, of Society. Will they never leave me in peace and let me live in my own way, as I understand it? If my freedom is troublesome to someone, or to the world, I don't give a damn, believe me. Let them shoot me, I'd prefer that. Shooting or something else or nothing at all, it's all the same to me. Here or elsewhere, free or in prison, the great thing is to feel happy. One's life, from being an exterior thing, grows inwards. Its intensity stays the same; and, d'you know, it's most mysterious, the corners in which the joy of living can sometimes hide away.

'Well, as I told you, I have no idea who cared for me in my earliest childhood. Mercenaries. I was always handed

over to mercenaries. I have no recollection of a nanny or a favourite servant. So many people held me, so many hands mauled me. Except once, for an arse, no human face ever leaned over my cradle. Yes, it's the truth. I can see myself clearly as I was at three. I had a little pink dress. I was always alone. I loved to be alone. I loved to play in dark, good-smelling corners, under the table, in cupboards, behind the bed. When I was four I used to set fire to the carpets. The fatty smell of the charred wool drove me into ecstasies. It was delicious. I devoured raw lemons and sucked bits of leather. The smell of old books used to turn my head as well. I had a dog. No, wait. It was not until much later that a dog became my playmate. I remember being ill for very long, and I've never forgotten the profoundly insipid taste of the orange-flavoured milk they gave me to drink.

Formerly a royal residence, the castle of Fejervar had already been used for some generations as a place of exile for my dethroned family. The immense halls, the great apartments were deserted. But a horde of servants still paraded about in knee-breeches and white stockings, their jackets embroidered with bicephalous eagles and generously adorned with gold braid. Yet all the exits from the park were guarded by the infantry. Hussars and cuirassiers in white took turns mounting guard at the castle.

I always had the greatest admiration for the tall cuirassiers in white. When I passed them in the corridors the sentries, at shoulder arms, did an automatic about-turn, with a sharp click of the left heel that ended in a soft whisper of spurs, according to the custom in the Austrian court which obliged the soldiers of the guard in the private apartments of a prince to turn their faces to the wall when he passed. I often stayed more than half an hour before one of these back-to-front giants, listening to the dying silver sound of the spurs and the rattling of the sabre-chain; then I went on to the next to see the same movement repeated. Nothing in the world would have made me

play a trick on one of these huge, impassive creatures, intimidated as I was by their uniformity, by the regularity of their jerky movements, searching (as I also was) for the secret spring that made them act like heavy, highly intelligent machines. And this is probably the source of my love for machines in general. One day I had run away to the meadow which lay at the end of the park—an immense meadow always filled with sunlight and shining crickets, where the sky was greater and more blue than elsewhere, where I always dreamed of living, of going mad from sheer freedom, of disappearing for ever—I thought I would die of shock and joy when, that evening, one of the soldiers who had been searching for me finally found me and carried me back triumphantly in his arms. That is why the mechanical sound of any motor or moving machinery has been connected ever since in my mind with images of distance, of light, of sky, of space, of immensity, of freedom, and moves me still with prodigious violence.

‘One day the palace was turned upside down. Orders were given in loud voices. Flunkeys ran up and down the stairs. Windows were opened, the great halls aired out; slip-covers disappeared revealing gilded furniture. They came early to wake me. I was six years old. The whole day there was a coming and going of state carriages. In the outer courtyard sharp commands rang out, and troops in smart formation presented arms to the sound of fife and drum. Then they came to fetch me and I went down. The hallway was filled with people, ladies in court dress and officers in full regalia. And suddenly the silver trumpets of the guard sounded from the grounds without. A carriage had just stopped before the palace steps. From it descended a venerable general and a little girl decked out in ribbons. I was pushed towards them, and paid my civilities to the little girl. She was hiding her face behind a bouquet of flowers and I could see only her eyes, filled with tears. I took her hand. The old general guided us, muttering unintelligible things in a trembling voice. The procession

formed behind us and followed to the palace chapel. The ceremony went on without much attention from me. Kneeling on the same cushion, enveloped in the same veil, joined by the same ribbons whose ends were held by the maids of honour, we plighted our troth to each other, exchanged vows. At the moment of the nuptial blessing the little girl smiled through her tears.

'We were united. Princess Rita was my wife.'

'And now we were standing under a sky of white roses. The witnesses, the guests filed past before us, making their reverences. A little later we were alone at table before heaps of delicacies. Then the general came to take the little girl away. I kissed Rita hastily and, as the carriage moved off, ran away weeping to the great hall where the wedding reception had been held. It was lit up *a giorno* and now deserted. Curled up in a ball on the ancestral throne, I passed the first sleepless night of my life under the gaze of two perfumed eyes that peeked out from a bouquet of weeping flowers.'

This ceremony had made a stunning impression on me. From a solitary creature, I turned dreamer. Now I wandered through the house, traversing the silent suites, prowling upstairs, downstairs. I always had white flowers in my hand. Sometimes I turned quickly, thinking someone was watching me. Two eyes followed me everywhere. I was under their spell. My heart beat fast. I was hoping to discover the little princess behind each door. I crossed halls and galleries on tiptoe. About me all was throbbing in the silence. The parquet floor was paved with tiny, trembling hearts on which I hardly dared to step. The tiny heart, the eyes of the Princess Rita were echoed everywhere, to disappear, at the other end of the galleries, in an infinity of mirrors. I went on towards that gaze as if on a bridge of filigree, stretched taut, elastic and fragile. Only the heavy furniture had compassion with my melancholy, and when it creaked with a hollow sound I was filled with terror. And when at the end of a dark corridor or the

bottom of a stairway a cuirassier on duty suddenly did his about-turn, with a whisper of spurs, I was carried back to the day of the wedding-feast. I heard again the trumpet calls and the roll of drums. The salvoes of the cannon. The bells. The organ playing. Princess Rita's barouche crossed my sky like a meteor and flew on to crash with a great racket at the other end of the meadow. The old general fell out on his head, pirouetted like a clown, waved his arms and legs, made signs to me. He was telling me to come, to come and join them, that the princess was waiting for me, that she was there, in the meadow. The air suddenly filled with a living perfume of clover-blossoms. I wanted to go down to the meadow. The sentries stopped me. A sea of fire fell perpendicularly on my life. Everything was whirling. A dizzy motor lifted me in the air. Tiger-striped suns set the clouds on fire, and I was falling, falling from them, heavily.

'It's night. A metallic fly is pestering me. I cry out. A cold sweat bathes my body. Then it's over. I snap back prone in bed like elastic.

'Soon all the things that had always left me indifferent began to exasperate me. The major-domo, the tutor, the fencing master, the language teacher, the stable boys, no, no one had Rita's eyes. I wanted to kill them, to put out their eyes when they looked at me; especially those of the major-domo, bloodshot like the eyes of a eunuch, and those of the servants: castrated eyes in which a gleam of malice strayed. I often had fits of rage, attacks of violence which horrified my entourage. I did what I liked with my time. I should have liked to destroy myself. I often prodded a knife deep into the flesh of my legs.

'The day finally came when I saw my longed-for Rita again. It was the anniversary of our wedding. No bells rang, no trumpets sounded as Rita descended from the carriage. She had a great bouquet of blue flowers, and I noticed for the first time her curling locks. The general was with her. We spent the day in my room, her hands in

mine, looking into each other's eyes. We said not a single word. That evening, when it was time for her to go, I kissed her on the mouth, lingeringly, in the general's presence. Her lips had a taste of ferns.

'It was the following day, the day after this second departure of Rita's, that I took scissors and cut out the eyes of all my ancestors hanging in the portrait gallery. I had come to have a horror of these eyes. I had studied them for a long time. I had examined them attentively. None of them had that liquid depth, that crystalline pigmentation that dissolves in emotion, that spark of life that gives a troubled, shifting colour to some point in the swelling pupil; these eyes did not move as if on long flower-pistils, they had no hands with which to touch, they had no perfume. I cut them out pitilessly.'

'And so I reached the age of ten, seeing Rita once a year, on the anniversary of our wedding day. The sinister, nameless old man who was directing my education then decided to do something about me. I received a letter enjoining me to come to him in Vienna. I was to become a page at court. I was to leave Fejervar the day before Rita's fourth annual visit. I made up my mind to run away. That morning I went down to the stables. The horses belonging to the duty squadron were there. Reveille had just been blown. The guard was changing. The men were all busy on guard, or cleaning their quarters, or washing at the pump. I opened wide the stable doors. Then, having tied myself beneath the belly of my black mare, I set fire to the hay in the mangers and to the straw bedding. In a trice it was flaming and crackling. Blinded, maddened, the horses raged out of the stable. In three leaps my mare had joined the herd. In this way I passed under the sentries' noses. But I was destined to ill-luck. A soldier fired in the direction of the fugitives. My horse collapsed and I rolled in the dust, crushed beneath the animal. When they picked me up I was covered with blood. They took me to the palace. My skull was cracked, my ribs were splintered, my leg

was broken. But even so I was happy, I wouldn't be going to Vienna, and Rita would come after all.

'But Rita never came.

'I waited impatiently for her the whole day. I was feverish. I called for her. That evening I grew delirious, and remained so for three weeks. Then my youthful constitution again got the upper hand. I grew calm. I grew stronger. At the end of two months I was convalescing well. I was able to stand. But my right leg hung stiff. I cannot say, granted the complication of the fracture, if they had thought it impossible to set the leg, or if the doctors had obeyed orders from higher-up which prevented them from taking timely action. I'm inclined to believe the latter. In short, my knee became ankylosed. This lameness you see is due to the vengeance of that sinister old man in Vienna. This was how he punished me for disobeying his orders.

'This adventure made me reflect upon my situation in the world, my social position, the friends, the enemies I might have, my family connections, my kin, and, most of all, my relationship to the court in Vienna. I had never thought about these things before. Now I was aware of the mystery that surrounded me and of all that was strange and abnormal in my cloistered upbringing. I was to all intents sequestered; but in whose hands, and in whose power? As soon as I could get about on my crutches I went to the library to study my family papers. That was where I spent the next three years (during which I was not to see Rita) studying, deciphering old manuscripts and private deeds and charters. The castle chaplain, a kindly octogenarian very devoted to my family, helped me with the Latin. Thus I learned the history of my House, its former grandeur and the meaning of its present disgrace, and I was able to judge the full measure of the irreducible hatred vowed to us by the Viennese. I resolved for ever and in every way to throw confusion into the watch they kept over me, to thwart their plans, to resist their orders, and to

escape from the power of the old man who wore the crown. I should have liked to flee, to quit the kingdom and the empire, to live far away from the politics of the double monarchy, to be on the outside, anonymous, mingling with the crowd, lost in an unknown land, abroad.

'And this is where the story of the dog comes in, the story I began to tell you a while ago. A dog was my only companion during those long years of study, a very common doggy, a humble shepherd-dog. He came into the library one day and lay down at my feet. When I left, he followed me; and later, when I began to regain the use of my leg and to grow accustomed to this horrid limp, trying to get along with only one cane, he went with me everywhere, yelping with joy at the slightest progress I made and often leaning his haunch against me in vigorous support. This was why I had taken to him.

'But then, who should turn up again but Rita. One day she arrived unannounced. She was alone. During our three years of separation she had grown up. She was no longer the child I had known, but a lithe young girl, healthy and well-formed. She seemed not to notice my lameness, but went off at a run in the maze of corridors. I followed her, hobbling along as best I could. When she reached the boudoir which had formerly been my mother's, she threw herself into an armchair and burst out sobbing. I mingled my tears with hers. We passed some hours in each other's arms, kissing each other on the neck. Then Rita freed herself from my embrace and left, as she had come, running like a deer.

'This brief and sudden visit from Rita threw me into a strange confusion. Comparing myself with her, I found that something in me had changed. For one thing, my voice had broken, it now had deep, moist tones and long, flute-like notes, it would change its register and modulation without warning. Try as I would, I couldn't bring it under control. My voice was Rita's voice. This discovery dismayed me. A little later I made a second discovery which was to prove

tragic. I had given up the library. Perched at the topmost window, on a high stool, I spent whole days looking in the direction of the setting sun towards which Rita had fled. It was precisely in the direction of the meadow. Thus, the dreams I had had as a nervous child were confirmed. They were true, there was a reason for them. I began to think most attentively about my previous life. I noticed for the first time the silence in which I had always been immersed. Since my abortive escapade my guard of honour had been taken away and replaced by a company of Slovak infantry. No longer did the trumpets sound and the drums roll excitedly at regular intervals, there was no more of that inimitable shiver of spurs that had always delighted me; only the troopers' raucous voices which sometimes reached me from outside, or the hollow thud of a rifle-butt in a hallway or behind a door, or some such everyday sound that came to scratch and deface as with a diamond my crystalline indolence. Then, at this shock, everything was shaken into movement. Everything around me became a voice, an articulation, an incantation, a tumescence. I could see the swaying of the tree-tops : the foliage of the park opened and closed, borrowing the gestures of voluptuous forms; the sky was tense and arched like a rump. I became extraordinarily sensitive. Everything was music to me. An orgy of colour. Vigour. Health. I was happy. Happy. I was aware of the profound life and ticklish root of the senses. I threw out my chest. I felt myself strong, all-powerful. I was jealous of all nature. Everything should give in to my desires, obey my whims, bend before the wind of my breath. I commanded trees to fly, flowers to rise in the air, I ordered the meadows and the house foundation to turn, to about-face. Rivers, flow back to your source : let all things fly to the west to feed the furnace of the sky against which Rita soars like a pillar of perfume.

'I was fifteen.

'In these moments of exaltation everything that called me back to reality exasperated me. This was how I grew en-

raged at my poor brute of a dog, who was always in the way. His eyes, his faithful animal eyes that were always fixed on mine, drove me wild; I found them stupid, meaningless, whining, idiotic. Melancholy and hang-dog. Joyless and without abandon. And that breathing, that short, broken breathing that expands the ribs like an accordion, trembling ludicrously in the stomach, rising and falling, abrasive as a piano exercise that never skips a note, never makes a mistake, never hesitates! At night it seemed to fill my whole room. From a skeleton he had grown enormous, corpulent, grotesque. I was ashamed of him. He was offensive to me. At times, I was afraid of him. It seemed to me that it was I who was breathing in this way, poor and vile, humiliated and impoverished. One day I could stand no more. I called the hateful dog and put out his eyes, slowly, deliberately and expertly. Then, taken by a sudden madness, I grasped a heavy chair and broke it over his back. This was how I rid myself of my only friend. Please understand me. I was obliged to do it. My whole body was filled with pain. My ears. My eyes. My spine. My skin. I was tense. I was afraid of going mad. I finished him off as if he were the lowest swine on earth. And I couldn't really tell you why. But I did it, by God!—and I would do it again, if only to gloat once more over the sorrow it all cost me. Sorrow, nervous excitement, a sudden discharge of all my feelings. Now, if you wish, call me a murderer, a demiurge or a savage, whichever you please, I don't give a damn, for life is really an idiotic business.

‘What’s more, listen to this : I pulled it off again, this thing, this crime, this brilliant piece of idiocy, this fit of madness, and the second time in such a striking fashion that you may perhaps understand what was behind it.

‘The days, the weeks, the months went by. It was just at the beginning of my eighteenth year, and Rita came to live at a nearby castle. That year I saw her almost once a week. She came each Friday. We would spend the day in the fencing hall of which I was particularly fond because it

was so bright and had no furniture. Stretched out on a gymnastics mat, face to face, leaning on our elbows, we would look in each other's eyes. Sometimes, too, we went up to the second floor, where Rita would play one of the instruments in the little square salon. At other times again, but very rarely, Rita would dress up in old-fashioned gowns, rig herself out in ancient costumes that she dug out of the wardrobe closets, and would dance on the lawn in broad daylight. I could see her feet, her legs, her hands, her arms. Her face would grow flushed. Her neck, her breasts would swell. And when she had gone I would remain spellbound by the lingering charm of having held her, supple, warm, throbbing, in my arms at the moment of farewell. But there was nothing I loved so much as our long, wordless sessions in the fencing hall. She gave off a perfume—crushed walnuts and watercress—in which I luxuriated in silence. She did not, so to speak, exist, it was as if she had been dissolved, I absorbed her through every pore. And from time to time I would run my hand through her hair.

‘I was the comb that magnetized her long hair. I was the bodice that moulded her waist. The flimsy tulle of her sleeves. The dress that moved over her legs. I was the little stocking of silk. The heel that bore her. I was the exquisite ruffle at her neck, her ingenuous puff of rice-powder. I was hoarse, like the salty pungency beneath her arms. I became a sponge to freshen the moist parts of her. I made myself triangular and iodized. Humid and tender. Then I became a hand to unbuckle her belt. I was her chair, her mirror, her bath. I possessed her wholly and from every side, like a wave. I was her bed.

‘I have no notion how my gaze told her all that; but very often I hypnotized her, without trying, without knowing.

‘I should have liked to see her naked. I told her this one day. She would never consent to it. Her visits became more rare.

'Without her, deprived of her weekly presence without which I could no longer live, I grew nervous, irascible, melancholy. I could no longer sleep. At night I was pursued by carnal visions. I was surrounded by women of all colours, of all sizes, of all ages, from every epoch of history. They were stacked before me, rigid as organ-pipes. They gathered in a circle around me, lying down, up-ended, lascivious as stringed instruments. I subdued them all, enflaming some with a look, others with a gesture. Standing, raised above them like the conductor of an orchestra, I gave the rhythm for their excesses, speeding or slowing their ecstasies *ad libitum*, or stopping them abruptly to make them start again a thousand thousand times *da capo*, repeating, reworking their gestures, their poses, their frolics, or forcing them to start all together, *tutti*, thus hurling them into a delirious vertigo. This frenzy was near to being the death of me. I was burned, I was skin and bones. Deep circles hung under my eyes. On my face, lined like a page of music, I bore the traces of my insomnia. Acne pricked triplets on my skin, the figured bass of an unfinished score.

'My whole body was covered with gooseflesh.

'I grew ashamed, timid, anxious. I no longer wanted to see anyone. I never left the fencing hall, where I had shut myself in. I neglected myself. I no longer washed. I no longer undressed. I even revelled in the doubtful odours of my own person. I enjoyed urinating down my legs.

'It was then that I developed a violent passion for objects, for inanimate things. By objects I don't mean all those useful articles, the rich furnishings and *objets-d'art* with which the palace was crammed and which, by some erethism of mind or sentiment, evoke, suggest or recall an ancient civilization, an age long past, a faded family or historic scene, charming and intriguing one with their shapes, their baroque lines, their anachronistic refinement, with all the things that situate them, date them, giving them their names and revealing in a curious way the signature of the fashion that imagined them; no, I fell in

love only with ugly objects almost without workmanship, and very often with raw matter, primary matter itself. I surrounded myself with the most heteroclite articles. A biscuit-tin, an ostrich-egg, a sewing machine, a piece of quartz, a lead ingot, a stovepipe. I spent my days turning them this way and that, touching them, smelling them. I rearranged them a thousand times a day. They served to amuse and distract me, made me forget those powerful emotions of which I was so weary.

These objects taught me much.

'Soon an egg, a stovepipe could excite me sexually. The lead ingot had the soft, warm texture of chamois. The sewing machine was, as it were, the plan or cross section of a courtesan, a mechanical demonstration of the prowess of a chorus girl. I should have liked to part the perfumed quartz like two lips and drink the last drop of primordial honey that the origins of life had deposited in those vitreous molecules, that drop that shifts like an eye, like the bubble in a spirit-level. The tin box was a reasoned précis on womankind.'

'The simplest figures, circles, squares, and their projections in space, the cube, the sphere, spoke to my senses like the scurrilous symbols—red and blue lingams—of obscure, barbaric ritual orgies.

'Everything became rhythm for me, and unexplored life. I grew frenzied as a Negro. I didn't know what I was doing. I shouted, danced, howled. I rolled on the floor. I did Zulu dances. Seized with religious awe, I prostrated myself before a block of granite which I had had placed in the room. That block was as full of life as a demons' carnival, bulging with riches like a horn of plenty. It was loud as a beehive and hollow as an ardent sea-shell. I plunged my hands into it as into a bottomless sex. I battered the walls to cleave and transpierce the visions that rose on all sides. In so doing I bent and twisted sabres, foils and rapiers and demolished furniture with crushing blows. And when Rita sent for me—she still came from time to

time, on horseback, never even dismounting—I wanted to slash her riding habit.

‘One time, however, towards the end of summer, Rita did dismount, dressed in her long skirt. Unprotesting, she let herself be led to the fencing hall. She stretched out, as she used to do, facing me, on the floor. She was especially kind that day, gentle and grave, and she gave in to my slightest whims.

‘“—Turn your head a little,” I would say to her. “There. Thank you. Now don’t move, I beg you. You are lovely as a stovepipe, smooth and rounded into yourself, elbowed. Your body is like an egg on the sea-shore. You are concentrated as rock-salt and transparent as rock-crystal. You are a prodigious blossoming, a motionless whirlpool. The abyss of light. You are like a sounding-line that sinks to incalculable depths. You are like a blade of grass magnified a thousand times.”’

‘I was frightened. Terrified. I wanted to sabre her. And now she’s getting up. Is she nonchalantly pulling on her gloves? Is she telling me that she is leaving? That this is the last time? She tells me that she has been called to Vienna, that she will spend the winter at the court, that she has already been invited to balls, to parties, that the season promises to be a brilliant one . . . I don’t listen to her. I can hear nothing. I rush at her. I throw her down. I strangle her. She struggles, she lashes my face with her riding crop. But I am on her already. She has no time to cry out. I have thrust my left fist into her mouth. With the other hand I deal her a terrible wound with a knife. I open her belly. A river of blood flows over me. I tear at her intestines.

‘And here is the result. They lock me up. I go to prison. I’m eighteen. That was in 1884. They put me in the fortress of Pressburg. Ten years later they transfer me secretly to Waldensee, among the madmen. Have they quite given up all thought of me, then? I am a madman. And have been for six years.’

(e) His Escape

The escape is now definite.

I handed in my resignation, determined to accompany Moravagine wherever he went. I had finally encountered an individual of the type I had always been curious to know. What did one murder more or less in the world mean to me? Or the discovery of yet another corpse of a pre-pubescent girl?

At last I would live closely with a great human wild animal, I would keep watch over, share, and be a companion in his life. Steep myself in it. Take part in it. Deviate and imbalanced he was, to be sure, but in what sense? Moravagine. Amoral. An outlaw. A case of impulsiveness, raw nerves, or too hectic cerebral activity? I would be able to study in the raw the successive phenomena of the subconscious and see through what meticulous mechanisms instinct passes in order to transform and amplify itself, deviating to the point of distorting itself.

All things are in flux, in agitation, everything overlaps and joins with everything else. Even abstractions sweat and grow dishevelled. Nothing is motionless. There is no isolation. Only activity, concentrated activity: form. Every form in the universe is exactly calibrated and passes through the same matrix. It is obvious that the bone should hollow itself out, that the optic nerve should be ramified in a delta and stretch outwards like a tree, that man should walk upright. That taste of brine that rises from our entrails comes from our farthest piscine ancestors, from the depths of the seas; and this epileptic twitching of the epidermis is as ancient as the sun.

On 30th September, 1901, I was waiting for Moravagine some two hundred metres outside the wall of the park, on a side-road, in the bushes. Some days before, I had gone to Colmar and rented a luxury touring-car. I had given Moravagine everything he needed for his escape. He was to leap over the wall on the stroke of midday. He was a little overdue. I was just beginning to grow impatient when I heard a loud scream and saw my animal come running, a bloody knife in his hand. I pulled him hurriedly aboard and we were off. He leant over to me : 'I got her !'

'What, what ?'

'The little girl picking brushwood at the foot of the wall !'

This was the beginning of a ramble that was to last for more than ten years and take us through every country on the globe. Everywhere Moravagine left one or more female corpses behind him. Sometimes out of pure fun.

(f) Our Disguises

It was not yet three o'clock when we arrived at Basle. I took the Spalenrain route and crossed the Rhine at the Saint-Jean bridge. People saw two Englishmen in our car. Thus no one paid any attention to us. We plunged into the forest of Langen-Erlen and, taking the little country road that follows the Birsig, we crossed the German frontier without trouble.

We stopped at Weill, the first village in Baden-Württemberg, where the good citizens of Basle come for their Sunday outings. I lifted Moravagine in my arms and deposited him in the outdoor arbour of an inn. A plaid blanket hid his legs. He had glued on white side whiskers. Now he was an old pensioner installed in a wicker armchair. As we drank our tea we conversed in Swiss-German, very loudly. We left after nightfall. We abandoned the auto in a copse full of brambles. The 2.15 through-train slows down for the curve at Leopoldshöhe. We leap aboard the moving train. We get off again at Freiburg in Breisgau. There, two noisy Italians board a fourth-class coach in an emigrants' train. The next morning an express from Cologne takes us back towards Wiesbaden, where we settle into a family *pension*, quiet and out-of-the-way. Moravagine is an infirm Peruvian diplomat who is taking the waters. I am his secretary. We stay there two months without moving, so as to throw off pursuers. Not a word in the newspapers, the whole thing seems to have been hushed up. One fine day we go to Frankfurt, to M . . . n, the secret banker of the family of G . . . y.

Moravagine cashes in on a treasure.* Then we set off for Berlin.

* For Moravagine's treasure. Cf. *Axel*, by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam.

(g) Arrival in Berlin

It was intolerably hot in the train. We were both in our shirtsleeves. Moravagine was in a state of violent excitement. It was his first day of real freedom. The sight of this industrial Germany made him ecstatic. We crossed Saxony at high speed. The train leapt at the switch-points, made turn-tables ring, plunged under concrete bridges in the cuts, rattled across metal viaducts, sliced diagonally through huge, deserted marshalling yards, tearing at the fanned-out rails, climbed and fell, shattering the peace of little towns and villages. Everywhere there were factories, mines, smelters, scaffoldings, steel pylons, glass roofs, winches, steam cranes, enormous tanks, plumes of smoke, piles of coal-dust, cables stretching from one end of the horizon to the other. The earth shrivelled, dried-out and peeled by the thousands of fires lit in all the furnaces and this splendid late-autumn day grew more and more torrid. Moravagine shouted for joy. He leaned out the carriage window, stuck out his tongue at the station-masters with their red caps who stood heels together in their office doorways, and thumbed his nose at the switchmen. He wanted to strip and plunge stark naked into the invigorating stream of air as the train sped on. I had my hands full preventing him. Luckily we were alone in our compartment. I struggled with him for a moment and succeeded in making him lie down on the seat. He went to sleep. We had just left Magdeburg, its great towers rising menacingly out of deserted, crepuscular flat-lands.

We arrived in Berlin, Friedrichsstrasse, during the night at 11.07.

At the hotel we found our luggage covered with multi-coloured butterflies. They were little squares of paper which the porter and the coachman had stuck on during the drive. Each one bore the address of a woman. Moravagine collected them with care.

(h) His Education

Moravagine had registered at Berlin University. He had been issued a casual student's card in the name of Hans Fleicher. He assiduously followed Dr Hugo Riemann's lectures on music. Living quietly in the industrial suburb of Moabit, where we had rented a small modern house, we spent three austere years in study and endless reading. It brought back to me my solitary student's life in Paris. At night we often went for walks in the fields. Meagre tufts of grass sprang out of the yellowish sand, and a few thin clumps of trees. The moon, rifled like a cannon-shell, seemed to shoot from the sudden smokestack of a factory as if from the mouth of a howitzer. Hares scampered between our feet. Moravagine would grow talkative, impressed by the silence of the night and the phantom forms of objects and of couples, soldiers and bare-headed girls, which we scared up along the shaky palings. He would tell me about his life in prison.

'In Pressburg my cell was very small. It was six metres long and two wide. That scarcely bothered me, accustomed as I was to lead an indoor, sedentary and almost motionless life. Nor did it make me miserable. But what caused me immense suffering from the very beginning, what I could never get used to, was the continual darkness, and the lack of air. How can one live among shadows, far from that light that opens and distends your pores and penetrates you like a caress!

'A wretched little slit of light entered at ceiling level, caught between stones, and let in only a pale reflection, a quivering, stale, anaemic, bluish ray of the great light of

outdoors. It was like an icicle with a trembling drop at its tip. And it was in that water-drop that I lived for ten years, like a cold-blooded creature, like a blind proteus!

'The dark brought some relief. The night-lamp on the ceiling burned until dawn. To my staring eyes it grew enormous, brilliant, dazzling. Blinded by this flickering flame I would finally fall asleep.

'I'm telling you the things that helped a little at the beginning. Another thing was the latrine water gurgling at regular intervals in the pipes. This noise seemed horrendous to me. It filled my whole cell. It tumbled and resounded in my head like a waterfall so that I saw mountains, and breathed the scent of pines. I saw, caught between two rocks, a branch that a breeze caused to sway to and fro, to and fro, to and fro. But in the long run I grew accustomed to this strange unstopping of the pipes. I would sit for hours without hearing it. Then suddenly I would wonder if it had already happened, or if it were about to happen. I tried frantically to recall how often it had already taken place during the day. I counted on my fingers. I pulled on them until the knuckles cracked. It became a mania. And then the noise would burst forth just when I least expected it, sweeping away the whole scaffolding of my counts and calculations. I would run to the floor latrine to verify the facts. The bottom of the nauseous hole was motionless as a mirror. As I leaned over it I blocked all its light. I had been wrong. The flushing had taken place nowhere but in my head. I had not really heard it. I was losing track of time, and had to start all over again. I was filled with boundless despair.

'I began wanting to hear nothing at all. By an act of will I made myself deaf. Deaf, plugged-up, deaf. I passed my days on my pallet, lying on my side with knees pulled up, my ears full of wax, curled up around the whole of my being, tiny, tiny, still as in my mother's belly. Then a powerful smell of drains would pinch at my nostrils, would lard me with splinters of alkali. My nose was varnished.

I would sit up haggard on my cot. I should have liked to die. I caressed myself until I bled, thinking I would die of exhaustion. Then this became a habit, a mania, an exercise, a game, a kind of hygiene, a solace. I did it several times a day, mechanically, without thinking about it, with cold indifference. And that gave me resistance. I grew more solid, more robust. My appetite was good. I began to put on weight.

'In this way the first eighteen months of prison passed. I never thought of Rita, nor of her death. I never felt a twinge of remorse. None of this affected me in the least.

'In this state of physical courage and equilibrium I began to take exercise. I strode up and down my cell. I wanted to explore it. I placed my feet on every stone, on every crack, meticulously. I went from one wall to the other. I took two steps forward, one step back. I concentrated on not stepping on the cracks between the stones. I jumped first over one, then over two. A piff and a paff and a poof, moon on the chimney, chimney on the roof. I walked in a straight line, diagonally, in zigzags, in circles. I walked with legs crossed, I walked pigeon-toed. I made faces with my legs. I tried the splits. I strove to walk without limping. I learned to know the slightest roughness in the floor, the slightest slope, the smallest worn spot. I knew them with my eyes closed, for there was not a square quarter-inch of the floor that I did not tread thousands and thousands of times, shod, in stocking feet or barefoot, or even explore with my hands.

'This little game ended by boring me to death. My limping footsteps echoed under the vault like a death-bell. I had had enough. Once again I began to pass all my time on the mattress, staring at the walls. Their rough stones were carelessly hewn and unplastered, with dribbles of mortar in the cracks. End to end, they ran off in pairs, angular, irregular, innumerable. They were very close-grained, very soft to the touch. I often laid my tongue

against them. They had a faintly acid taste. They had a good stone-smell about them, of flint and slate, silex and clay, water and fire. In time I came to recognize each of their good, fat, benevolent faces.

'But as time went on my perception grew sharper. I could distinguish bulging foreheads, hollow cheeks, sinister skulls and menacing jaws. I studied each stone with an anxiety bordering on terror. A faint, reflected light made them stand out strangely. The dribbles of mortar assumed fantastic shapes. All my concentration centred on these vague bodies, tried to see them in relief and give them contours, and my mind, in a kind of perversity, seemed to be intent on terrifying me.

'That was the end of my peace and quiet.

'Each stone began to turn, to stir, to come loose. Grimacing heads stretched out towards me with gaping jaws and rigid horns. Streams of larvae trickled from every crack, from every hole came monstrous insects armed with saws, with mandibles, with giant pincers. The wall rose and fell, vibrated, whispered. And great shadows swung forward. Frescoes, friezes paraded past my eyes, scenes of misery and mourning, of torture and crucifixion. And the shadows swung outward like the bodies of hanged men. I crumpled back in my bed. I closed my eyes. Then, after the water snorted I heard a sound of spurs. A white cuirassier enters my cell. He throws me in the air like a ball, catches me, swings me to and fro, juggles with me. And Rita is watching us. I am ecstatic. I groan, I weep. I can hear myself. I can hear the voice of my own suffering. I recognize my voice. I pity myself. I bemoan myself.

'Why, oh why?

'The ceiling becomes hollow like a funnel, a dizzy maelstrom that greedily sucks in the whole of nature in confusion. The universe resounds like a gong! Then all is drowned out by the fearful voice of silence. Everything disappears as I return to consciousness. Gradually the cell grows larger. The walls are pushed back. The enclosure

retreats. Nothing is left but a derisory bit of human flesh, gently breathing. It is as if I were inside a head where everything is a kind of silent speech. My fellow-condemned relate the stories of their lives, their troubles and their crimes. I can hear them in their cells. They are praying, trembling, walking. Pacing softly to and fro in the deepest part of themselves. I am the Hall of Echoes of the universe compressed in the space between my bedside and my wall. Good and evil shake my prison, and anonymous suffering too, that perpetual motion that defies nature's laws. I am dumbfounded at this overwhelming tongue dinning at my ears, stupefying and absolving me.

'Systole, diastole.

'All is palpitating. My prison disappears. The walls are struck down, there is a beating of wings. Life lifts me into the air like a gigantic vulture. At this height the earth is rounded like a breast. One can see through its transparent crust the veins of the core with their scudding, red pulsations. On another side the rivers run, blue like arterial blood, and in them billions upon billions of creatures are hatching. Above, like dusky lungs, the oceans swell and fall in turn. The two glacier eyes are close together and roll slowly in their sockets. Now see the double sphere of a forehead, the sudden crest of a nose, its flinty ledges, its steep walls. I fly across Mont Dore, hoarier than the head of Charlemagne, and land on the rim of the ear which yawns like a lunar crater.

'This is my eyrie.

'My hunting ground.

'The entry to it is almost obstructed by a fabulous protuberance, a burial mound, a tomb of ancestors, behind which I hide. Here there is a hole into which each noise from outside falls like a pachyderm in a pit. Only music is able to slip through the narrow corridor to be picked up all along the walls of the inner cone. There it was, in the utter darkness of the cavern, that I captured the loveliest forms of silence.

'I held them, they slid between my fingers, I recognized them by their feel.

First, the five vowels, wild, apprehensive, watchful as vicugna; then, following down the spiral of the corridor, ever narrower and lower, the edentate consonants, rolled in a ball in a scaly carapace, sleeping, wintering through the long months; farther still, the fricative consonants, smooth as eels, nibbling at my finger-tips; then the weak ones, flabby, blind, often slobbering like white worms, and these I pinched with my nails, scratching their fibrils of prehistoric turf; then the hollow consonants, cold, cutting, corticate, which I gathered on the sand and collected like shells; and, at the very bottom, flat on my belly, leaning over a fissure, there among the roots, I felt God knows what poisoned air come whipping at me, stinging my face, while tiny animalcules skittered over my skin in the most ticklish places; they were spiral-shaped and shaggy like a butterfly's proboscis and let off sudden, raucous, husky sounds.

'It is noon. The sun pours boiling oil in the ear of the sleeping demiurge. The earth opens like an egg. Out of it surges a tongue, undulating and bloodshot.

'No. It's midnight. The tiny night-lamp is exhausting as an arc-light. My ears are buzzing. My tongue is peeling. I make futile efforts to speak. I spit out a tooth, the dragon's tooth.

'I am not of your race. I belong to the Mongol clan which brought to the world a monstrous truth : the authenticity of life and the knowledge of rhythm, which will always lay waste to your houses, static as they are in time and space, localized in their pigeon-hole rows. My stallion is more savage than your broken-winded gears, his horned hoof more perilous than your iron wheels. You do well to hem me in with the hundred thousand bayonets of Western enlightenment, for woe unto you if I leave the dark of my cave and set about in earnest to chase off your clamourings. And on my steep banks let your pontoneers never waken

my aching tympanum, for I will unleash at you the curved wind whistling like a scimitar. I am impassive as a tyrant. My eyes are two war-drums. Tremble if I leave your walls as Attila left his tent, masked, swollen to giant size, wearing no more than the hooded cloak like my comrades in prison at the hour of their last walk, lest with my strangler's hands, my hands reddened with the cold, I force open the bile-filled belly of your civilization!

'In the prison yard the night sky unfurls my tattoos. A great fire sears the changeless steppe of the night, changeless as the bottom of Lake Baikal, changeless as a turtle's back.

'In it, I look at my reflection.

'Music and the distances of stars.

'I am the indifferent one.

'Nothing now could rouse me from my quietude and calm. The years ran by. I had reached the point of no longer thinking. I was immobile. They brought me food and drink. They took me outside, they brought me in again. I was not there. I was motionless, with some activity or other at my fingertips, in my knee, in my last vertebra, in my head. I felt pleasure, but I did not think. My fingers were far away among the spleenwort in a quarry. My knee reflected light, refracted its rays, struck chips from the sun like a gem. My spine was in travail like a tree in spring, with a bud, a pinnule, a palmetto cabbage on the tip. My head like a starfish had only one hole that served it as mouth and anus. Like a touched zoophyte I pulled my life back into the depths of myself. I digested myself in my own stomach. Physically, this left me dried out.

'There was a nail driven in my cell-wall, high up the wall. From long looking at it I ended by seeing it. I had been watching it for ten years without noticing it. A nail, what's a nail? Twisted, rusted, it's myself stuck in between the stones. I have no roots. Thus it was that when they came to get me and transfer me to Waldensee they were able to extract me without effort, without pain. I left

nothing behind me but a little pale-grey dust, ten tiny years, a little spider-dust, an imperceptible sign on the wall that faced me, beyond the vision of my successor.'

(i) Jack the Ripper

Moravagine was in despair. After three years he began to realize that his studies were useless. He had wanted to study music, hoping to come closer to the rhythm of origins and find the key to his being as a justification for living.

As it is performed (and especially as it is taught) music is no more than a laboratory experiment, the diagrammatic theory of what modern technique and mechanics achieve on a vaster scale. The most complicated machines and the symphonies of Beethoven move according to identical laws, they progress arithmetically, they are ruled by a need of symmetry which breaks down their motion into a series of minuscule, minute and identical measures. The figured bass corresponds to a certain meshing of gears which, infinitely repeated, releases with a minimum of effort (wear) the maximum aesthetic value (useful energy). The result is the construction of a paradoxical, artificial, conventional world which can be taken to pieces and put together again at leisure by the understanding (dynamic parallelism : has not a learned Viennese physicist taken the trouble of tracing all the geometric figures projected by the Fifth Symphony, and has not a learned Englishwoman just recently translated into vibrations of colour the sound vibrations of this same symphony? This parallelism applies to all the 'arts', and hence to every theory of aesthetics. Trigonometry shows, for example, that we can reduce the Venus de Milo to a series of mathematical formulas, and if the marble in the Louvre should be destroyed we could, with a little patience, reconstruct it with the aid of these same formulas and reproduce it exactly an incalculable number of times,

just as it is, forms, lines, volumes, stone texture, wear, weight and aesthetic emotion all included!). The rhythm of origins could only be said to intervene if a machine, as soon as it were built, should start up of its own accord with no application of external energy and continue eternally to produce useful energy (Cf. perpetual motion). This is why the closest study of a musical score will never reveal to us that initial palpitation which is the auto-generator and nucleus of the work and depends in its climacteric on the author's general condition, his heredity, his physiology, the structure of his brain, the speed or slowness of his reflexes, his erotic life, etc. There is no science of man, man being essentially the bearer of a rhythm. Rhythm can not be reduced to a diagram. Only a few very exceptional individuals, the 'great madmen', can receive a vehement revelation of it, presaged by their sexual disorientation. And so it was in vain that Moravagine taxed his ingenuity to find an external cause for his discomfiture at living, and sought for an objective theorem that would authorize him to be what he was. Music, like all sciences, is truncated. Professor Hugo Riemann had made himself the philologist of every last note. Using the comparative study of musical instruments, he reconstructed the etymology of every sound, going back in each case to the vibratory source. Sonorousness, emphasis and tone were always modalities, physical accents in the movement, and never revealed anything of the internal structure, the innate articulation, the breath and spirit which amplify an empty sound to the stature of meaning. In the beginning was rhythm, and rhythm was made flesh. Only the greatest, the most obscure and, hence, the most ancient and authentic of religious symbols could have given Moravagine his reply, not these footnoted discoveries by a grammarian of music. But Moravagine had no talent for religion. Whether out of atavism or pride, he never in my hearing spoke of God. Or rather only once did he pronounce this name that he had seemed not to know. It was

on a sidewalk, before a public pissoir. Moravagine stepped in some filth. He grew pale, and, gripping my arm, 'Shit!' he said, 'I just stepped on the face of God!' And he stamped and scraped so as not to take the least particle away with him.

Moravagine was in despair. He could no longer read a book. Science is history arranged according to the superstition and taste of the moment. The vocabulary of scholars has no wit, no salt. These heavy tomes have no soul, they are filled with distress

Moravagine runs out on me. I spend whole days without seeing him. Then a dark rumour begins to spread through the populous quarters of the city's centre. There is a maniac who hides in shadowy hallways, in houses with two exits. He rushes at women, rips open their bellies and flees. He proffers his earnest attentions by preference to young girls, and even attacks children. He leaves fresh victims every night and operates as far out as the last suburbs. Berlin is in a ferment. The populace is terrorized. The rumours grow more precise. The papers devote whole columns to lists of victims of the one they call 'Jack the Ripper'. They print his description. A reward is posted for his arrest. I recognize the silhouette that emerges from these articles. It is Moravagine. One day I question him. He admits all. It is time to go elsewhere and find another outlet for this frenzy. I get him on a train. Three days later we are in Moscow.

(j) Arrival in Russia

Late September 1904

Moscow is beautiful as a Neapolitan saint. An azure sky reflects, examines, marks the bevel of the thousand-thousand towers, steeples, and campaniles that rise and stretch up, rearing, or fall back heavily in fat, bulbous forms like many-coloured stalactites, bubbling and crawling with light. The streets, paved with cobblestones, are full of the rattling of the million hackney-cabs that teem there day and night; narrow streets, or straight, or curved, they worm their way between the red, blue, saffron and ochre façades to widen suddenly before a golden dome whipped like a top by flocks of noisy crows. The whole scene is raucous, everyone shouts, from the long-haired water-bearer to the tall Tartar selling used clothes. People pour from shops and chapels on to the sidewalks. Little old women sell Crimean apples smooth as gall-nuts. A bearded constable leans on his long sabre. Everywhere underfoot are chestnut burrs and the crisp cupules of tiny, black ash-berries. A fine dust of horse-dung falls in a drizzle like the flakes of russet gold in a liqueur. On the great squares the trams, with a loud screeching of wheels, make their turns around pyramids of shining 'arbutus berries' which are not fruits of the arbutus but water-melons. An acrid, musty smell of rotten fish stands out sharply from the honeyed background odour of musky leather. Two days later snow falls. Everything is hidden, subdued. All sounds are muffled. The sleighs pass silently. It snows. It snows feathers of down and the roofs are puffs of white smoke. The houses

retire into themselves. The towers, the churches are eclipsed. The bells ring underground, with a wooden knell. The restless multitudes have found a new tempo, their steps are short and hurried, they rush along. Every passer-by is a clockwork toy. The cold is like a resinous glaze. It lubricates. It fills your mouth with turpentine. Your lungs are greased and you feel a tremendous hunger. In every house the tables groan under the weight of food; golden fragrant cabbage pies, lemon bouillons with sour cream; appetizers of every shape, for every taste; smoked fish; roast meats; grouse with a sweet-sour jelly; game meats; fruit; bottles of spirits; black bread, soldier's bread, and *kalatch*, that pure flower of the wheat.

The Russo-Japanese war was drawing to an end; the first creakings of the revolution were making themselves heard.

Sitting in Phillipov's we saw, Moravagine and I, the first stains of blood pierce the snow. They spread like clusters of dandelion-leaves all about the Governor's Palace, a great wine-coloured space in the city's centre where the snow was beginning to melt. We were also witnesses of the first riots, far out in a working-class district whose name I have forgotten, the other side of the Smolensk railway tracks, and wounded students were carried off by the Cossacks and the police.

Soon the revolution broke out.

We took an extremely active part in it. We established contact with the committees in Geneva, in Zürich, in London and in Paris. Moravagine put enormous sums at the disposal of the central treasury of the Russian Socialist Party. We also supported the Russian and international anarchists. Clandestine presses were set up in Poland, in Lithuania, in Bessarabia. Bales of newspapers, pamphlets and tracts travelled in all directions and were distributed in bulk in factories, ports and barracks by the little Jews of the Bund, who were in our pay. They contained attacks on universal suffrage, on liberty and fraternity and

preached the social revolution and an all-out class war. They demonstrated scientifically the legality of the expropriation of property in all its forms—theft, murder and extortion—and the necessity for social and economic terror through the sabotage of factories, the pillage of public property, the destruction of railways and port installations. They also contained a number of formulas for making bombs and detailed instructions on the use of infernal machines. Depots of armaments were established in Finland. Frenzied propaganda was carried on among the troops at Mukden and Karbin and all along the Trans-Siberian. Mutinies sprang up almost everywhere, assassinations were carried out in every city of the giant country. The imagination of the masses had been caught, strikes were organized in every industrial centre, pogroms ravaged the cities of the south-west. The reaction promised everywhere to be frightful and merciless.

Then the dance began.

We were in a ticklish spot.

I do not propose to retrace here the history of that revolutionary movement which lasted from 1904 (the attempt on Plehve's life) to 1908 (the dissolution of the third Duma), nor do I intend to list the incalculable number of political assassinations committed, the riots and revolts, the troubles and disorder, nor to go into the bloody annals of the reaction, machine-gunnings, mass hangings, deportations, arrests, sequestrations, nor to enumerate all the cases of terror, of collective madness at the court and among the people and the bourgeoisie, nor to tell why the most ardent followers of the pure Maria Spiridonova or of the heroic Lieutenant Schmitt lost sight of their revolutionary ideals of social renovation and went about in gangs committing common-law offences, nor how the lively intellectual younger generation came to reinforce and lead the ponderous army of crime. These events are still in the memory of all and already form a part of history. If I speak of certain tragic episodes and sketch them in crudely it is

only to give a better notion of the process of Moravagine's development and describe the way in which he was exposed to the atmosphere of Russia at the time.

This epoch, which set Holy Russia a-tremble and saw the beginning of the Czarist throne's decline, left an indelible mark on the hundred and twenty million inhabitants of this vast empire. Madness and suicide became everyday phenomena. Everything was thrown out of kilter : institutions, family traditions, the notion of honour. A frantic loosening of all ties, which was mistaken for mysticism, was at work in every level of society. Schoolboys and girls under fifteen became addicted to saninism; prostitutes organized themselves in unions and the first demand on their list was the right to human respect; illiterate soldiers began to philosophize and their officers argued over orders received. In the countryside the new laxity of morals was even more pronounced, and religion's ancient trunk put forth unexpected and virulent shoots. Hysterical priests and monks emerged suddenly from the population to rise as far as positions of high influence at court; whole villages joined in half-naked, flagellant processions; on the Volga, Jews committed ritual crimes, slaughtering Orthodox new-born babes to celebrate Easter. Strange Asiatic superstitions spread among these motley populations and manifested themselves in the form of monstrous and repugnant practices. A man drank menstrual blood to hold fast the affections of a fickle chamber-maid; the Empress anointed her hands with dog-filth to massage the vast forehead of the hydrocephalic crown-prince. The men became paederasts, the women lesbians, and every couple practised Platonic love. The general thirst for pleasure was unquenchable. In towns the façades of houses were rent by the gaping, flamboyant doors of bars, of dance-halls, of night clubs. In neighbouring booths or private salons of the great restaurants—The Bear, Palkin's, The Islands or The Moïka, cabinet ministers resplendent in their grand crosses or shaven-pated revolutionaries and long-haired students

vomited champagne among the debris of broken china and raped women.

Rifle fire crackled amid the muffled explosions of bombs. And then they went back to their orgies.

What a field of observation and experiment for a scientist! On both sides of the barricade, unheard-of acts of heroism and sadism. In the depths of the prisons, in the casemates of the forts, in the public streets, in the lodgings of conspirators, in workers' slums, in the receptions at Tsarkove-Selo and in the sessions of the Councils of War, everywhere, one met with nothing but monsters, deviate humans, dismayed, incapacitated, all their nerves raw and overstrained : professional terrorists, priests who were paid instigators of riots and uprisings, bloodthirsty young aristocrats, inexperienced and clumsy executioners, police officers who were cruelly bureaucratic and sick with terror, governors emaciated by fever and the insomnia that comes with responsibility, princes stricken dumb with remorse, or trauma-ridden grand dukes. Madmen, madmen, madmen, cowardly, traitorous, besotted, cruel, sly, villainous, two-faced masochists and killers. Irresponsible maniacs. What a clinical sight, what a heyday for experiment! And even though I was unable to reap anything from all this—kept frantically busy as I was by events, by Moravagine's influence over me, by the long series of adventures into which he hurled me, by the life, with its thousand vicissitudes, into which he dragged me, the life I was forced to live, an active life full of direct action, that direct action that is worthless to an intellectual—at least I never for a moment lost my scientific coolness nor my attentive curiosity. For that matter, as I had dedicated myself wholly to Moravagine, the spectacle of him was sufficient for me.

(k) Mascha

Moravagine had already sacrificed the greater part of his fortune to the revolutionary movement. The small sums that we could still lay our hands on were swallowed up by the urgent needs of the Party. One day we would be in Warsaw, the next in Lodz, then in Byelostock, Kiev or Odessa. We were lodged by devoted partisans who almost always lived in the ghettos of these towns. We picked up work here and there in dock-yards or factories or, when help failed to arrive from abroad, we stole merchandise from the docks or from railway warehouses. After such crimes we usually disappeared into the countryside. Village schoolmasters would hide us for months on end and finally direct us to senior workers, overseers or foremen, who would give us employment for a time in the mines of the Urals or the steel foundries of the Don basin. Moravagine experienced a sensual pleasure in plunging at last into the most anonymous abyss of human poverty. Nothing discouraged or disgusted him, not even the enervating promiscuity of the poor folk who took us in, the putrescent filth of the workers and peasants, the nauseating dishes which, in the towns, certain wretched Jews offered us at table, nor the overweening presumptuousness that was the fashion in revolutionary circles. I could never quite grow used to the communist manners of the Russian students and intellectuals, and when Moravagine saw me flinch before an overripe pickled herring or a plate of *kascha*, or grimace when a comrade borrowed my underwear or pulled on a pair of my trousers, he would laugh his head off, enormously amused.

For his part, he was at home everywhere, and I never saw him so gay, so talkative and carefree as he was at that time. He passed himself off as the famous terrorist Simbirsky, Samuel Simbirsky, the *narodnovolye*, the assassin of Alexander II, escaped from Sakhalin, and his prestige was tremendous everywhere. It was Mascha Uptschak who had had the idea of this subterfuge when the true Samuel Simbirsky died in an attic in the Impasse du Maine in Paris, of tuberculosis of the bone.

Mascha stayed with us through all our wandering. Moravagine was very taken with her and this relationship which, as we shall see, developed in a rather unusual fashion, later had a great effect upon his ideas.

Mascha Uptschak was a Lithuanian Jewess. She was a big woman with an opulent bosom, and a belly and behind that were, one might say, cumbersome. From this abundant body protruded a long, soft, flexible neck which supported a minuscule, bony head with drawn features, a sickly mouth and a forehead like a dream. With its frizzled hair it resembled the pasty face of a romantic poet, the face of a Novalis. Her great, staring eyes were pale blue, cold blue, blue enamel. Mascha was extremely short-sighted. She could have been between thirty-five and thirty-eight. She had been a serious scholar in Germany, with a solid education in mathematics behind her, and had even written a book on perpetual motion. She was a cruel, cold and logical woman, never at a loss for ideas, with a satanic inventiveness and perversity when it came to planning some new stroke of devilry such as carrying out an assassination or slipping out of some police snare. It was she who prepared our plans down to the slightest detail, and everything was foreseen and timed, minute by minute. Each of us knew exactly what he had to do, second by second, covering a certain area, taking up a certain position, making a certain gesture, stooping, running, one, two, three, four, leaping with the bomb, firing a revolver in his own mouth or making off; and deeds and events

took place exactly as she had calculated, leading one to the other and falling into place just as she with her prescience and realism had said they would. She often astounded us with the daring of her ideas and the clear and logical way in which she explained them. She was a mixture of tragic actress and prophetess. She had an infallible way of choosing, among all the vague generalities that made up the intelligence we received, the one typical, true, reliable and human detail that must be taken into account in order to succeed. In action, in the field, she was without fear. But in matters of love she was sentimental and stupid, and Moravagine often drove her into a rage.

We met Mascha in Warsaw while she was managing our main clandestine printing press. It was she who wrote our proclamations, those manifestoes and pamphlets which had such an influence on the masses, setting off so many strikes and causing so much destruction. She had a genius for the rostrum, and no one knew as well as she how to appeal to the base instincts of the mob. The dominating way of her fiery eloquence was irresistible. She grouped her facts succinctly, explained them and gave them the emphasis that suited her purpose, then suddenly drew conclusions from them which were astonishing in their simple, concise logic. She could rouse the fanaticism of the people by enumerating how many victims had fallen in this place or that for such and such an ideal, commemorating those who died on the barricades on such and such a day in a particular place, naming those who chose to rot in a dungeon rather than betray the just claims of the working class. Then she would remind people of the thousand little annoyances that each of them had had to put up with from bosses, factory-owners or landlords; at such times she grew insinuating and spiteful like some old gossip, and there was nothing like the memory of these countless petty vexations to put the proletariat in a rage and make them join the movement.

In private, with Moravagine, she was a different person.

She grew vulgar, whining, sensual and lascivious, and Moravagine tormented her terribly.

Mascha and Moravagine formed an incongruous couple. She, strong, substantial, enterprising, with the ways of a man, a strapping virago (except for the soft curve of her neck, her little, bird-like head, her staring eyes, her pallor, the disquieting fissure of her ghoul's mouth); he, minuscule, puny, bandy-legged, prematurely aged, spiritless, obliterated, his face ossified, of doleful mien (but from time to time shaken by a sudden burst of laughter, a demoniac hilarity that sent him reeling). I understood perfectly that a twisted mother-instinct had impelled Mascha to adopt this wretched weakling of a Moravagine and look after him, coddling and holding him in her arms, hugging him with all her strength; what I could not understand was the way in which Moravagine let her have her way, he who had always hated women. Equally inexplicable were his sudden rebellions, when I saw him leap up to insult, humiliate, mock and often beat her. I thought for a time that he did this out of simple cruelty, and only much later, when Mascha wanted a child, did I realize that love is a deadly poison, a vice, a vice that one wants to see shared, and that if one of the two involved is smitten, the other is often no more than a passive participant, or a victim, or possessed. And Moravagine was possessed.

Love is masochistic. These cries and complaints, these sweet alarms, this anguished state of lovers, this suspense, this latent pain that is just below the surface, almost unexpressed, these thousand and one anxieties over the loved one's absence, this feeling of time rushing by, this touchiness, these fits of temper, these long daydreams, this childish fickleness of behaviour, this moral torture where vanity and self-esteem, or perhaps honour, upbringing and modesty are at stake, these highs and lows in the nervous tone, these leaps of the imagination, this fetishism, this cruel precision of the senses, whipping and probing, the collapse, the prostration, the abdication, the self-abasement,

the perpetual loss and recovery of one's personality, these stammered words and phrases, these pet-names, this intimacy, these hesitations in physical contact, these epileptic tremors, these successive and ever more frequent relapses, this more and more turbulent and stormy passion with its ravages progressing to the point of the complete inhibition and annihilation of the soul, the debility of the senses, the exhaustion of the marrow, the erasure of the brain and even the desiccation of the heart, this yearning for ruin, for destruction, for mutilation, this need of effusiveness, of adoration, of mysticism, this insatiability which expresses itself in hyper-irritability of the mucous membranes, in errant taste, in vasomotor or peripheral disorders, and which conjures up jealousy and vengeance, crimes, prevarications and treacheries, this idolatry, this incurable melancholy, this apathy, this profound moral misery, this definitive and harrowing doubt, this despair—are not all these stigmata the very symptoms of love in which we can first diagnose, then trace with a sure hand, the clinical curve of masochism?

Mulier tota in utero, said Paracelsus. Which is why all women are masochists. Love, for them, begins with the ripping of a membrane, to end with the fissure of the whole being at the moment of childbirth. Their whole life is nothing but suffering. Every month they are flooded with blood. Woman lives under the sign of the moon, that pale reflection, that dead star, and this is why, the more life she brings into being, the more she engenders death. The mother is far more a symbol of death than of generation, and which mother would not prefer to kill and devour her children if she could be sure in so doing of binding to her and keeping her male, of being permeated by him, absorbing him from below, digesting him, letting him be macerated within her in a state reduced to that of foetus, and carrying him thus her life long in her womb? For that is what it all amounts to, this tremendous machinery of love : the absorption, the reabsorption of the male.

Love has no other end, and as love is the whole moving force of nature, the sole law of the universe is masochism. This ceaseless flow and passage of lives, what is it? Destruction, nothingness; and this diversity of forms, this slow, painful, illogical and absurd adaptation in the evolution of creatures—just so much pointless cruelty and suffering. A living being never adapts to his environment, or, if he does, he dies in the process. The struggle for life is the struggle for non-adaptation. To live is to be different. This is why all the great vegetable and zoological species are monstrosities. The same applies in the moral field. Man and woman are not made to understand and love each other, to melt together and be indistinguishable. On the contrary, they detest each other and tear each other to pieces; and if, in this battle which bears the name of love, the woman passes for the eternal victim, it is in reality the man who is killed, time and time again. For the male is the enemy, an enemy who is clumsy, blundering and over-specialized. The woman is all-powerful, she is more firmly seated in life, she has numerous erogenous zones and thus is better able to bear suffering, she has more resistance, her libido gives her extra weight, she is the stronger. Man is her slave, he surrenders, he wallows at her feet, gives up without a struggle. He submits. Woman is masochistic. The sole principle of life is masochism and masochism is a principle of death. For which reason existence is idiotic, imbecile and vain, without ultimate purpose. And life is futile.

Woman is malignant. The history of all civilizations shows us the devices put to work by men to defend themselves against flabbiness and effeminacy. Arts, religions, doctrines, laws and immortality itself are nothing but weapons invented by men to resist the universal prestige of women. Alas, these vain attempts are and always will be without the slightest effect, for woman triumphs over all abstractions.

In the course of the ages, sooner or later, we see all

civilizations in jeopardy, disappearing, declining and falling into ruin through rendering homage to woman. Rare are the forms of society that have been able to resist this impulse even for a few centuries, as did the contemplative order of the Brahmans or the categorical community of the Aztecs; the rest, like the Chinese, have succeeded only in inventing complicated systems of masturbation and prayers to calm the frenzy of the female, or, like the Christians and Buddhists, have resorted to castration, corporal penances, fasting, cloisters, introspection and psychological analysis to give men new counter-irritants. No civilization has ever escaped submission to the female, apart from a few rare societies of young and ardent male warriors whose apotheosis and decline were as swift as they were short, such as the paederast civilizations of Nineveh and Babylon, which were more perfectionist than creative, knowing no restraint in their feverish activity, no limit to their enormous appetites, no bounds to their needs, and which devoured themselves, so to speak, as they disappeared, leaving no trace of themselves, as all parasitic civilizations perish dragging a whole world with them. There is not a man in ten million who escapes this obsession with women or who, if he murdered one, would do it directly, with one blow. And murder is, at that, the only efficient means that a hundred billion generations of males and a thousand-thousand centuries of human civilization have found to avoid the domination of womankind. That is to say, nature knows no sadism, and the great law of the universe—creation and destruction—is masochism.

Mascha was a masochist and, being Jewish, she was doubly so; for is there a people in the world more profoundly masochistic than Israel? Israel made for itself a God of pride, with the sole purpose of mocking him. Israel accepted a rigid Law, with the sole purpose of transgressing it. And the whole history of Israel is the history of this outrage and this transgression. We see the Chosen People betray and sell their god and haggle over the law. And we

hear the threats and maledictions falling from heaven. The blows rain down. Calamities come, one tripping over the next. Israel suffers, weeps and groans, bemoaning its exile and bewailing its captivity. Ah, this great love! The hand of the Lord oppresses it and crushes it. Israel twists and cringes, Israel sheds tears of blood. But Israel takes pleasure in its baseness and delight in its degradation. What luxuriousness, and what pride! To be the cursed people, the people stricken unto its last generation, the people dispersed by the blows of the Lord God himself, and to have the privilege of self-pity, of loud self-pity, the privilege of picking petty quarrels and crying out one's ignominy, to have the mission of suffering, of adoring one's own pain, of cultivating it and secretly contaminating foreign peoples therewith. This perversity and subtlety of a whole nation explain the great dispersion of the Jews and their strange lot in the world, although their effects are everywhere deleterious. The Jews are the only ones to have attained the extreme social levelling towards which all civilized societies are moving today—a movement which is nothing but the logical development of the masochistic principles of their moral life. The whole modern revolutionary movement is in the hands of the Jews, it is a Jewish masochistic movement, a desperate movement with no other issue than destruction and death: for such is the law of the God of Vengeance, the God of Wrath, Jehovah the Masochist.

These conclusions on masochism, which I owe in great part to Mascha, allowed me to see in a new light the whole Russian terrorist milieu in which it was my privilege to live. What better proof could there be of the profound semitization of the Slavic world than the composition of our party, its action, its rapid development, its growing popularity, its success? The very fact that such a tiny handful of men could not only exist in the midst of their struggle but could stimulate the sympathy of the mob and attract its support to the point of being able to count upon a regular influx of capital, gave us reason for the greatest hope, and

from that time we began to envisage the world revolution and the overthrow of all the nations of the West, which are all in as miserable a state of cross-breeding as Russia itself. *Mascha* drew up statistics on the density of Jewish communities in other countries, and *Moravagine* talked of setting up a powerful association of Jewish emigrants to be placed under the tutelage of our most skilful propaganda agents.

Within the party itself, of 772 professional terrorists 740 were Jews and the rest were nationals of smaller groups enclosed in the vast Russian empire, Latvians, Finns, Lithuanians, Poles or Georgians, who had joined the movement to grind the axe of local interests or to hasten the liberation of their oppressed compatriots. Among the women the inverse proportion prevailed. Of 950 female comrades two thirds were Russian or Polish and barely a third were Jewish. The Central Executive Committee was exclusively composed of Jews, apart from *Moravagine* and a single Russian, the daredevil W. Ropschin, the favourite of Lady Luck, the boss, the specialist who had whipped our combat organization into shape.

The revolution was in full swing. In ever greater numbers converts from every social class were flocking to join us from all corners of the country, many of them very young society ladies tormented by a thirst for martyrdom. Most of these recruits served as spies or agitators. This was of immense help to us, as we thus had absolutely first-hand intelligence and were warned at once if things began to stir anywhere. In order to take advantage of the least significant event or the slightest popular discontent—a strike, a local incident, a brawl in a market-place, a ruckus between Armenians and Tartars—we would rush at once to the scene to embitter the struggle, whipping up passions, provoking both sides, and bringing the crisis to a climax until it degenerated into a riot or a massacre. We made men rise up to face the inexorable, put weapons in their hands, sowed panic among the populace by spreading false

rumours, setting fire to buildings, disturbing the economic life of a countryside, cutting off supplies from a whole region, and then we would take advantage of the confusion to explode bombs, pillage a bank, empty a public treasury or execute a high official, some governor or general who figured on our black lists and whom we enticed into our snare by throwing a whole town into pandemonium.

Thus we were continually on the move. Moscow, Kronstadt, Tver, Sebastopol, Saint Petersburg, Ufa, Ekaterinoslav, Lugovsk, Rostov, Tiflis and Baku, each in turn received visits from us, was terrorized, overwhelmed, partially destroyed and to a healthy degree put in mourning.

Our state of mind was frightful, our life terrifying. We were trailed, we were tracked. Our descriptions were printed by the hundreds of thousands and posted everywhere. There was a price on our heads. The police of all the Russias was on our heels; we were harassed by a horde of spies, stool-pigeons, traitors, inside men and a swarm of detectives. As a state of siege had been declared throughout the whole territory of the empire, we had the entire army against us. Millions of men. We were obliged to defend ourselves against all and mistrust each single one. We were perpetually on the qui-vive. Whether for defence or offence we always had to improvise and create our tools of action, set up arsenals and secret caches of arms, run clandestine printing presses and counterfeiting dens, equip laboratories, organize men of good will, push those already convinced to the point of action, managing to give them the means to live and alibis and hideouts and false papers, hiding them abroad, turning them out to grass, putting them in action again, making them disappear; and all this activity (on such a vast scale that it would normally take thousands of civil servants, with offices, filing systems scattered throughout the whole country, with a central office, a known address and official branches abroad) all this activity was carried on secretly, unknown to the Authorities, without our ever daring to appear or show

ourselves or do anything whatever in the open. Our slightest move had to be shrouded in mystery and a thousand precautions, so that they would never, even by a chain of deductions, be able to trace anything back to us and trap us. Impossible to imagine what energy, what coolness, what will-power, confidence and enthusiasm we needed in order never to weaken or grow discouraged, despite the endless failures, the disappointments, the risks we ran each day, the crushing fatigue, the innumerable betrayals and the constant overwork. For we gave ourselves unreservedly and it is incredible that we were able to hold up physically, to carry on; we could not even sleep two nights running in the same room, and not only were we constantly obliged to change our living quarters, our civil status and identity papers, we also had to create each day a new face, a new style, a new personality, changing our names, our habits, our way of speaking and our whole behaviour. I assure you, the nineteen members of the Central Executive Committee were an extraordinary group, tremendous leaders of men and not afraid to risk their skins. No, our life had grown quite inhuman, and there was nothing surprising in the fact that so many around us faltered, even among our most cherished comrades.

The third year had just come to an end and the forces of reaction, which at one time had been shaken to their foundations, seemed to be recovering a certain impetus and little by little gaining the upper hand. Our operations grew desperate. Our isolation complete. The moderate parties, which had accorded us their sympathy and moral support and had in many cases been our active accomplices, now abandoned us and began an ardent campaign of denigration which convinced all the undecided, the chicken-hearted and the floating mass of the lower middle-class whose regular penny-bank contributions were indispensable to us. Our daily bread was cut off. This was a question of life and death for us. We were forced to change our money-making tactics and thus began a series of expropriations on

a grand scale which brought about an open split between us and the liberals and the intellectual parties, who accused us of brigandage and armed robbery. It is true that this policy, whose immediate motive was to obtain money, that nerve-centre of war, resulted in a breakdown of party discipline and opened the door to dissidence. The theoreticians and dogmatists disputed and criticized our concept of *Realpolitik*. They condemned our expeditions, which had been legal as long as we attacked only the State Treasury but became illegal as soon as we touched private capital; sentimental idealists were able to see only the faintest connection between these reclamations of cash and the pure ends and principles of the revolution; some party members, even expeditionary leaders, refused to take part in them or led them only half-heartedly; others, on the contrary, acquired a taste for it, and pocketed great sums, after which they would give themselves up to debauchery and never reappear among us; some addle-pates took up with common criminals and organized gangs of plunderers and hoodlums. Now not a crime was committed in Russia but it was imputed to us, and this was the worst possible publicity for us. Moreover, everyone was growing weary of this direct action which seemed to have no end, and which, far from dying down, was becoming more intense than ever, and at this moment was assuming its most acute form. We had many deserters. We were unable to explain or justify our operations, which were becoming more and more daring, or to have any public discussion on the legitimacy of our ever more frequent expeditions. We had neither the stomach nor the time to do so. We were being pursued, hard-pressed, and many who were more or less incriminated by association with us tried to clear themselves and regain the good graces of the government by betraying us, selling us out, trying their damnedest to see us caught. We were never so close to being caught, and our most relentless pursuers were those of our members who turned completely Cossack, joining the ranks of our

enemies and putting the police on a scent that was completely fresh and very much ours. The prisons were overflowing. Exiles to Siberia were counted in tens of thousands. Our most valiant comrades were in the depths of mines, pushing wheelbarrows, or wearing themselves out, ball and chain attached, in penal servitude in Sakhalin and Petro-pavlovsk. Many died under the knout in the chain gangs of the far north; others were suffering in the flooded dungeons of Schlüsselburg and the Peter-and-Paul fortress; those most dear to us were shot or hanged by night. Our numbers thinning, our backs to the wall, exhausted, we changed our tactics once more and decided to resort to sterner measures. We agreed, first of all, to purge the party mercilessly, and then to return to open action, striking a few smashing blows. In order to strike terror into the people and try to finish off the reactionary monster by aiming at its head, we resolved to carry out an attempt on the life of the Czar and, if possible, to wipe out at the same time the whole royal family.

To shake off pursuit and perfect our plans by working them out to the very last detail, we all left the country. Before the special Russian agents launched in pursuit could make contact with the international police and sniff out the traces of our passing in Posen, in Berlin, Zürich, Milan, Geneva, Paris, London, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Denver or San Francisco, we had already re-entered Russia by Vladivostok and begun to carry out our purge.

We worked all along the Trans-Siberian railway and slowly made our entry into European Russia. Everywhere we used the same procedure. We would convoke the local committees, then turn up suddenly in neighbouring towns where we were not expected, in the midst of meetings that were paralysed by our arrival. So as to keep up a semblance of legality in the eyes of our remaining followers, we set ourselves up as a revolutionary tribunal. All those who had played a direct or indirect part in our organization throughout the last few years appeared before us; coldly we con-

demned to death all those who in one way or another had had any dealings with the police, all those who seemed to us to have faltered, all the informers, all those grown luke-warm, weary, bourgeois. We were without mercy. There was only one sentence : death. On our own account and without trial we executed all influential members of regional committees on whom we could no longer count with complete certainty and who, because of their position and what they knew of our organization, could have grown dangerous. We executed them secretly and destroyed their bodies, or used the corpses to compromise this or that militant on whom we were unable to lay hands but who we wanted to disappear. When word of these exemplary punishments got around there was a great hue and cry in revolutionary circles. Groups of all shades of opinion put us on the index; everyone deserted us; we lost what was left of our support abroad, some of whom were precious to us, such as Prince Kropotkin, an armchair revolutionary who never managed to understand the exigencies of life on the barricades, its modification through modern techniques and the logical evolution of our methods of work. Our party fell to pieces and, taking advantage of the chaos which we had provoked and of the vacuum our new attitude had created all around us, we managed, thanks to a series of most precise denunciations, to catch, condemn and officially kill a host of suspect elements of which we could otherwise never have rid ourselves. The police were dragging their feet again, and this time we were the ones to push them into action ; they searched and arrested for all they were worth, and we took advantage of their activity to give them crossed and double-crossed trails to follow, making them believe that they had the main malefactors under lock and key. But we, for our part, remained unattainable, untouchable, mysterious, mythical, to the point that the highest authorities did not believe in our existence. But the people, warned by the surest of instincts, and having got wind of our offstage involvement in a thousand

dark melodramas, the people feared us like the Black Death, and had christened us the Spawn of the Devil.

And the people were right! We had always been pariahs, exiles, condemned to death, and it was long enough since we had had the slightest link with society or any human family; but now we went down of our own free will to do our probation in Hell. What obscure urge were we really obeying as we prepared our assassination of the Czar? And what was our real state of mind? I often wondered as I watched my comrades. We were abandoned by everyone and each one of us lived to himself, in a rarefied atmosphere, turned in upon himself as if contemplating an abyss. Was it vertigo or some sombre ecstasy? For a long time now neither I nor my comrades had known sleep. This was fatal. Blood calls for more blood, and those who, like us, have shed much of it, emerge from the red bath bleached as if by acid. Everything about them is blighted, dead. Feelings flake off and fall in dust. The senses, vitrified, can no longer experience pleasure; they crack at the least provocation. Each of us, within, was as if devoured by a conflagration, and our hearts were no more than a pinch of ashes. Our souls were laid waste. For a long time now we had believed in nothing, not even in nothingness. The nihilists of 1880 were a sect of mystics, dreamers, the routineers of universal happiness. We, of course, were poles apart from these credulous fools and their vaporous theories. We were men of action, technicians, specialists, the pioneers of a modern generation dedicated to death, the preachers of world revolution, the precursors of universal destruction, realists, realists. And there is no reality. What then? Destroy to rebuild or destroy to destroy? Neither the one nor the other. Angels or devils? No. You must excuse my smile: we were automats, pure and simple. We ran on like an idling machine until we were exhausted, pointlessly, pointlessly, like life, like death, like a dream. Not even adversity had any charm for us.

I watched my comrades very closely.

At this point we were all living together in the attic of the Polytechnical Institute of Moscow. The police, who kept a special eye on this school and came a score of times to search it while we were hidden there, never succeeded in smelling us out and always left empty-handed. We had our lodgings in little rooms wedged in below the building's very pediment, whose stone figures were hollow and could easily provide us with hiding places. One of the great pillars of the peristyle had been hollowed out and the stays and cross bars of a double steel armature, which we had substituted for its inner mass so as to sustain the heavy roof, served us as roosts, and as rungs to descend directly to the street. The cellars of the building were mined. A simple electric contact would have been enough to send the whole structure flying along with a good part of the town round about. We were prepared to sell our lives dearly.

We hardly ever went out, and this hermit's life seemed to us frightfully unreal. We were working under the direction of A. A. A., Alexander Alexandrovich Alexandrov, the learned chemist, and Z. Z., Zamuel Zlazek, a Montenegrin engineer. We never spoke to each other except about our work. None of us any longer believed in the success of our desperate enterprise. We all had the vague feeling that we were bound to fail, and that this abortion would be the end of our activity together. Each of us distrusted the others, we fully expected one of our members to betray us. We were obliged to execute Sashinka, a most courageous little Georgian who began to show signs of mental trouble; and the inseparable Trubka and Ptitzin, who had mutinied together in Sebastopol, poisoned each other one fine day without saying a word. No, it was no longer a question of the conquest of the world nor of its total destruction! Each one of us was trying rather to muster his most deeply hidden sources of strength, for these sources, diffused as they were, had left an inner void in us all. Each of us attempted to stem and hold fast

the unending flood of his thoughts which tended to trickle off into that inner void. Our personalities were in an evanescent state, with sudden fits of remembering, faint intimations from the senses, irradiations from the subconscious, degenerate appetites and a most insidious lassitude. Everyone knows these little manikins of elder-pith that have a pellet of lead at the base so that they always stand up on their feet, no matter how one puts them down. Imagine that the leaden pellets are a little off centre. One figure will lean to the right, another to the rear, another will bow its head or almost lie down. So it was with us. We had lost our balance, our sense of individuality, the perpendicular of our lives; our conscience was adrift, was sinking to the bottom, and we had no more ballast to drop. We were out of kilter. In this state we had just enough common sense left to laugh at ourselves, but with a diabolical, howling laughter. And this kind of laughter raised a thirst. Then one of us, usually Buikov, a lieutenant who had deserted, would go down to fetch a few demijohns of vodka. And the more we drank, the more grotesque, ridiculous and absurd we found our situation. And the more raucously we laughed, the more we drank. And laughed. Drank. Laughed. Ha, ha, ha !

I do believe that it was Moravagine who had implanted this laughter among us; for he, at least, still had something to cling to, and while the ground was slipping out from under us, he was trampling Mascha underfoot, degrading, brutalizing, bullying, tormenting her and amusing himself hugely—and laughing.

Mascha was the only woman in our group, and for this reason I observed her with special attention. For some time now I had noticed a remarkable change in her. During our voyage around the world she had already grown unbearable. Now she was at the end of her tether. She no longer understood what was happening to us and was in complete disagreement with our latest tactics. She felt that we were in for a catastrophe. She put the blame on Mora-

vagine, saying that he was responsible for everything, and went for him tooth and nail. There were continual scenes.

‘—Let me alone,’ she would scream. ‘I hate you. All this is your fault. You believe in nothing. You don’t give a fig for us. You care for nothing in the whole world. You’ll drive me mad!'

During our punitive expedition and party purge she came along only reluctantly, taking no active part in it, never opening her mouth at our meetings, showing her disapproval of all our decisions through her ferociously hostile attitude. She often disappeared on the way and only joined us again a few days later, at the last minute, just as the train was pulling out. We all had the impression that she wanted to leave us, and if she had killed herself at that time we should not have been surprised. Each of us had had similar crises, and we left her alone, without troubling her or keeping her under observation, for she of all people was reliable. None the less I remember following her during one of her runaway periods, not to spy on her but out of pure curiosity, to find out what she did when she was away from us. It was at Nijni, during the fair. Our comrades had a rendezvous at a circus with messengers from the north and south who were to pass them certain missives during the performance. They had no need of me, and I slipped off behind Mascha when I saw her leave the inn where we were staying. She wandered all night through the upper town, making two long stops before the police station and the headquarters of the special police. Then she went down to the lower town where she wandered past the sheds of the fur merchants, deserted at this time of day. I followed a hundred paces behind her. As it was raining we were both floundering in the mud and the night watchmen stared with surprise and suspicion as we passed. When she came to the river-bank she followed it along for almost three miles. At that point there was a kind of storage-place for wood, a tangle of tree-trunks on the shore with some half-submerged in the water. She settled down in the

midst of these and I was able to come quite near without her noticing. She was motionless, crouching, sunken together. Her arms embraced her legs and her head was buried between her knees. She was as still as the wretches who spend the night under the bridges of Paris. Two hours went by. A nasty, biting breeze had sprung up. Little, foaming waves struggled upstream to come spluttering against the shore. It was cold. Mascha's feet must have been in the water. I went towards her and suddenly laid my hand on her shoulder. She let out a hoarse scream. She stood up, then, recognizing me, she fell in my arms and began to sob. I held her as best I could, and, seeing nearby a small heap of sawdust. I led her gently to it, laid her in it and covered her with my overcoat. She was still weeping. I had lain down beside her, and she pressed herself against me convulsively, but I could make nothing of what she said through her sobs and hiccups. I was filled with a perplexing, new sensation. It was the first time I had felt a strange body stretched close beside my own, the first time I had felt an animal heat go through me. And so unexpectedly! This physical proximity put me in such a turmoil that my heart began to beat wildly and I no longer tried to understand what Mascha was saying. I was flat on my back, agitated and close to nausea. I felt that something frightful was about to take place. I clenched my teeth for all I was worth. My heart was beating in my throat. It seemed to me I was dangling in space. How much time slipped by? Suddenly I shook off this insidious languor. What had she been saying? . . . What? What was it she had said? . . .

'Mascha,' I shouted, and sat up with a start. 'Mascha! What are you talking about, you slut? What did you say?' And I shook her violently.

She was writhing on the ground. She was vomiting.

'Yes . . . look . . . here . . . feel . . . you can feel it . . . It moved today. . . . I'm going to have a baby . . .'

A mud-stained sunlight began to splatter the sodden fields, and the hateful, nasal world of birds began to come

to life. It seemed to me that I was coming out of a suffocating nightmare and that the low clouds flying before the wind were the shreds of an evil dream.

In my heart I had always detested her; now, her admission filled me with disgust.

I thought of my friend.

I cocked my revolver.

Then I put it away.

'Wretch!' I shouted at her, and went off running.

When I reached the inn I told Moravagine the whole truth, but he only laughed at my indignation.

'There, there,' he said. 'Don't get worked up over nothing. You'll see what you will see. And keep your eyes open. All this is only the beginning of the end.'

And he burst out laughing.

Several months had passed since this incident, the winter months that we had spent in the Polytechnical Institute in Moscow. There were only three to go until Mascha had her child and until our great plot was ripe for action.

We were to carry out our grand plan in June, on the eleventh. And the nearer this day came the more we slowly recovered our calm and self-control. Our anxiety grew less as the fever that possessed us dropped. We became more balanced, our thirst and our laughter subsided. We had our project well in hand and were getting back to something like a normal condition, to the quiet certainty, the self-confidence and relaxation that precede the great leap, the static restfulness that makes one so content, the lucidity that transfigures one's mind on the eve of any violent action, serving as its springboard. It was not a case of faith, it was not that we suddenly began to believe in the holiness of our task, nor that we had a mission; I have always attributed this state—which is physical just as much as psychological—simply to a certain occupational disease which one can notice in all men of action, in great athletes on the eve of a challenge just as in a business-man who is setting himself up for a killing on the stock market. For

action, whatever its immediate purpose, also implies relief at doing something, anything, and the joy of exertion. This is the optimism that is inherent in, and proper and indispensable to action, for without it nothing would ever be undertaken. It in no way suppresses the critical sense or clouds the judgment. On the contrary this optimism sharpens the wits, it creates a certain perspective and, at the last moment, lets in a ray of perpendicular light which illuminates all one's previous calculations, cuts and shuffles them and deals you the card of success, the winning number. All this is what is afterwards called luck, as if chance had not played its role in providing the given elements of the problem in the form of an equation to the n th power, and set the whole thing in motion. A gambler who loses is an amateur but a professional wins every time, for he always takes this power into account; and if he does not resolve it mathematically he calculates it in the form of twinges, superstitions, good signs, rabbits' feet, etc., like a general who calls everything off on the eve of a battle because the next day is the thirteenth or a Friday, or because he slung his sword belt backwards or his horse spilled oats on the left-hand side. In being sensitive to these warnings one is, as it were, examining the face of one's destiny, and this gives one gravity and portentousness and makes the onlooker or witness believe that the winner was chosen by the gods. The man who cheats in the great gamble of fate is like a man who makes faces at himself in a mirror and then, angry at this impudence and losing all self-control, shatters the mirror and ends up slapping his own face. Childishness: and most gamblers are children, which is why they never break the bank, and also why fate seems invincible.

In our case, if we had now grown serious, it was because each of us was living under the sign of his own fate—not in the shadow of a guardian angel, nor hidden in the folds of his robe, but as if at the feet of his own double which was detaching itself from him little by little to take on a bodily and material form. They were strange projections of our-

selves, these new beings, and they absorbed us to the point where we lived them as in a new skin, to the point of complete identity, and our final preparations were not unlike the process of putting finishing touches to those frightful, pride-ridden automatons known in magical lore as Teraphim. Like them, we were going to destroy a city, devastate a country, and crush the Imperial Family between our terrible jaws. We had no need to re-read the legend of the magus Borsa, the Ethiopian.

Here, then, are the new elements that were to pulverize the Empire.

The powerful explosive and the choking gas into which A.A.A. had poured all his will for destruction. The infernal machine, the subtly triggered bombs into which Z.Z. had put all his longing and desire for suicide. The meticulous preparation of the assassination, the place, the chosen date, the designation of our accomplices, the assignment of roles, our training programme, the necessary stimulants, the armament—into which Ro-Ro (our leader, Ropschin) had put all his will for power, all his love of risk, his energy, his tenacity, his mad temerity, his audacity, his decisiveness. We were trimmed for action and could not have reversed the process if we had wanted to.

In our midst, Mascha was like the pitiful mandrake, that miserable anthropomorphic root which tried to struggle with the brass head, that speaking head that gave warning to Ethiopia. Having suffered a physiological bipartition, she couldn't manage to separate the parts; and with her child in her womb she was incapable of forming a concrete picture of her destiny. As she had resorted to the most passive of methods, to an elementary law of materialization, to an ancestral and cellular process, each time she tried to conjure up her fate she slid back into the most vulgar animality without ever attaining a projection of the spirit. It was a frightful dilemma, and it was driving her mad. She had betrayed both: us, and her own fate.

She would be filled with bitterness at one moment, and

frozen through and through by a cold rage the next. And her belly grew more swollen from day to day. She submitted with bad grace to all the discomforts and troubles inherent in her condition. (Her mental disturbance was so great that she continued to menstruate right up to the eighth month of her pregnancy.) She was often ashamed of being a woman. Very often, too, she revolted. Ten, twenty times a day she would rise up against Moravagine. She looked as if she would strangle him. Her torso leaning forward, her hair crackling with anger, her mouth spitting serpents, her eyes bloodshot, her hands clutching at her belly, she would howl : 'You're disgusting, disgusting ! . . . I hate you . . . I'd like, I'd like to . . . '

Moravagine would be ecstatic. The rest of us breathed not a word. Then Mascha would lash out at all of us, calling us cowards and monsters.

'Can't you see that he's making fools of you, this . . . this miscarriage !' she would scream. 'Watch your step, he'll see you all hanged, he's a stool-pigeon. Oh, I'd like . . . I'd like to . . . '

And she would spit in his face.

'Rotten swine, you misshapen, sickening abortion ! . . . '

And she stamped in a fury.

Calling us to witness again, she would add : 'I warn you, he'll get you all. I know it, he told me himself. He has secret meetings with the police. You'll all be hanged, the stupid lot of you. But what am I talking about ! He wouldn't even have the guts to go to the police. I know him too well, he's a mollycoddle, a wet hen, he always backs down. No, he won't even have the courage to turn you in. But I will, I swear to you. You'll not get away with it. To hell with you all ! I . . . I . . . '

And she would leave the room, a sorry figure, slamming the door behind her.

She would hide away in her room, flinging herself on the bed, humped over her great belly as if it were a pig's bladder.

There she would weep for a long time.

But then would come the reaction, in the form of remorse, of whining, of misery. She was immeasurably unhappy. And her sorrow would burst forth: 'It's over, all over, for ever,' she would murmur. 'I'll never see him again. I've lost him for ever. No, oh no! . . .'

Then, evening would come. She would reappear in the doorway, weeping, begging.

'Comrades,' she would say, 'comrades, I beg your pardon. Pay no attention to me. Don't mind what I say. I'm nothing but a poor wretch.'

And she would crumple to the floor.

A moment later: 'Tell me where he is! Where did he go?'

Moravagine had gone out.

'Is he with Katya?'

And when no one answered: 'I must find him.'

She would tie a scarf over her head and go out after him.

She would run to Katya.

'Katyinka, Katyinka darling, is Moravagine here?'

'No, he just left.'

'He didn't say where he was going?'

'Have you two been at it again?'

'No . . . It was nothing . . . It was all my fault. But I have to find him. I must see him at once . . .'

And off she would go again, running. She wandered through the streets like a madwoman. She thought to herself, has he gone to them already? . . . No, no, he mustn't, he mustn't . . .

She went to the great square and took up her position in front of the police building. She sat on the edge of the fountain or leaned against a tree. Passers-by swirled around her, carriages, trams, barrow merchants. She saw nothing, heard nothing. Her eyes never left the yawning entry before which a guard was on sentry-duty. She was hypnotized by his uniform. She did not notice the people who

went in or out. Under the dark portal a little patch of colour was turning dizzily like a brightly-lit top. The flash of the bayonet pierced her brain.

'Where am I?' she would say to herself. 'What! Oh! . . . Careful, for God's sake, people are looking! Better go back . . .'

But she didn't leave. Now she was staring at all the passers-by. No matter how Moravagine disguised himself she would have recognized him infallibly.

She was so sure of herself now!

'The rat. I won't have it. He mustn't sell out on his comrades . . .'

And suddenly it occurred to her that perhaps she was being toyed with.

She recovered her guile, her aggressiveness. She changed place. She went into a neighbouring street. She took cover in the shadows. She took up her post in front of a little secret door that led directly to the office of Grigorii Ivovich Orleniev, our sworn enemy, the man who had undertaken to arrest us all and had been on our heels since the very beginning. It could only be with him that Moravagine had a rendezvous, and he could only go in or out by this little door.

She scrutinizes everyone who goes by. Her power of observation is so heightened that she records their slightest peculiarity, and all these nameless creatures will always remain imprinted on her memory. A double crease at the knee of a pair of trousers, a way of walking with the right foot slightly twisted, the leaning silhouette of a back, the swing of a cane, the twitch of a chin, a carbuncle on a neck—all this becomes unforgettable for her.

Suddenly she feels a great blow in the belly.

It's he! It's he!

She is running. She crosses to the other sidewalk. Be calm. It's Moravagine for certain. He sees you. She hugs the walls, advancing by starts, from one tree to the next. She changes sides several times, then runs in the middle

of the street, behind the box of a carriage.

She is sure of him now.

The man has led her into a distant, sinister part of town. He goes into a shop to buy cigarettes, then makes his way inside a railway station where he begins to read his paper. She suddenly sees his face brightly lit. At first glance she is disturbed, then horrified. Mascha takes to her heels. She thinks she has recognized an agent of the security police. She imagines that she has been recognized. She leaps into a tram. She changes cars twice, three times. She enters a café in the centre of town and leaves by the rear. She goes through the same manoeuvre in a church. She lets herself be hustled into busy streets, she's afraid of the great, empty stretches of the city. She slumps on to a bench. She has no idea how she came there. It's a boulevard that runs in a circle. She is exhausted. She can go no farther. Her cheeks are burning. Her belly is cold. Her legs are aching. She shuts her eyes. And this whole terrible day comes back to her. She is shaking. She wishes she were back among trustworthy comrades. She has no strength left. A clock strikes. Is it eleven at night or four in the morning? She is so weak she can no longer count the strokes. Then she stands up and stumbles off into the night.

She doesn't even look behind her.

Let it happen, or not happen, or happen—it's all the same.

‘... If I'm being followed, if I've been recognized, if I'm being tailed, I'll lead them straight to the Institute. We'll all be jugged. What can I do about it? ...’

She can no longer make two ideas connect. She is so weary! She has the feeling that each paving stone drops away like a trapdoor beneath her feet and that she is going up a long Calvary on her knees.

An arm slides under hers. A hoarse voice murmurs in her ear: ‘Mascha! How long have you been walking? Where have you been, Mascha? Who showed you the way?’

I know where you were. I know what you're up to. You're the one who'll sell us out. Nobody's taken in by what you say. We're keeping an eye on you.'

Mascha doesn't dare turn her head. Her failing gait grows still slower. Someone is there, at her side, walking along in the corner of her eye. Great shivers run up and down her back.

There's the voice again: 'Tell me you'll go back there, Mascha, tell me you'll go back.'

Suddenly Mascha begins to run with all her might. After a hundred yards she turns around swiftly.

'Yes, they'll get you all, every last one!'

She staggers, as if she had been struck by a fist between the eyes.

There is no one there.

No one.

No one had been following her. No one had spoken to her.

And yet . . . and yet . . .

She could swear that Moravagine had taken her by the arm a moment ago.

No, there's not a soul.

Perhaps it was the cop from the Gazetnyoi Pyereoulock?

No, there's really no one there.

What then?

Before and behind her the street is empty. The street lamps stand like great interrogation marks.

What now?

Mascha takes refuge in a coachmen's tavern. She orders food and drink. She watches the door. She watches the street. As soon as dawn shows in the dirty windows she gets up and goes out, overturning empty bottles. Now she is very calm. Nothing troubles her now. She needs the whole width of the sidewalk to keep on her feet.

When she reaches the Institute she finds us all at work among our mysterious infernal machines. No one pays any attention to her. She zigzags through our little room. She

makes sweeping gestures and talks loudly to herself. We don't know if she is drunk or practising her part as a future mother. She is talking to her baby.

'My darling, my sweet, you'll be handsome, you'll be tall and strong and wise. You'll be a free man. Freedom is the only treasure of a Russian man. You . . . ?'

She falls in a corner and goes to sleep.

Mascha's behaviour gave us cause for concern and made us take certain decisions that may have been a trifle hasty. We decided to send her away. Some wanted to liquidate her, but Ropschin's opinion prevailed—not without some trouble, for he had to plead her cause and did so with warmth. Finally it was unanimously decided that Mascha should leave us at once, that she should go to have her child in a villa in Terrioki on the Finnish frontier, a few miles from St Petersburg, and that we would always have time for further decisions after the child was born. We had enough on our hands for the moment. Moravagine, who was present during these discussions, made no move to take Mascha's part, which surprised me, as it did several of my comrades ; but when it was decided to postpone the execution I saw a smile of lively satisfaction spread over his face. He rose, came to press my hand and said in my ear : 'It's better this way. Now, you're going to see things. It's time for the big play. We're going to have some laughs, old friend !'

I looked at him, stupefied. Once again I found him completely incomprehensible. It seemed to me that he had suddenly grown younger. I had had this impression for some time now, each time I talked with him. The more Mascha went to pieces the more Moravagine seemed to grow detached and indifferent to her fate. It was only a short time ago that he was always after her, making her suffer and even taking a mischievous pleasure in her suffering. Now, it was as if he had been liberated, and of all our band he was the only one carefree enough to smile or even be ready to laugh over anything or nothing. This I found intriguing.

Was it unthinking innocence, or a sign of great strength? If the revolution had taught him laughter, had Mascha's terrible situation made him into a completely disordered, brutalized simpleton? He had no sense of responsibility, and grew more childish and playful every day. For a long time I thought he was the victim of his passion, but little by little I became convinced that this new attitude was due to some unthinkable magic that allowed him to draw back and get a second vital wind from some unsuspected reservoir. What kind of man was I dealing with here? Every time you thought that he was finished, at the end of his tether, exhausted by the most frightful moral crises, he emerged from his own ashes, fresh, pure, self-confident, hearty, and there he was again, intact. A graph of his life would have taken the form of an ascending curve which then fell and repeated itself several times, describing an ever-wider spiral around an ever greater multiplicity of worlds. What an admirable spectacle, always identical and always changing! The law of intellectual consistency, games of tender infancy! First a little span of tension that serves as trampoline for a tiny idea, hard and round as a marble, which later becomes this hand playing its game of precision, striking daring blows, setting off carom reactions that shatter all the ivory notions like so many suns thrown out of orbit, colliding resoundingly with each other in the process; and now this great mastery of men and the world, the same hand holding the orb of empire in its palm, weighing it, ready to hurl it like a bomb, ready to see it explode.

I looked at Moravagine with burning curiosity. There he was, sitting among us, yet he was alone, away, estranged as he had seemed to me the first time I saw him in his cottage at Waldensee, cold, self-controlled, disabused, blasé. In fact, it was he who had always been behind our actions, and though Ropschin was our leader, it was Moravagine who was master, the master of us all.

Suddenly, violently, I understood.

I remembered all that Moravagine had told me of his life in prison and his childhood in Fejervar. To my mind this confession now cast a strange light on our present activity. I was able to grasp the parallels, the analogies, the conformities between our terrorism and the most secret dreams of this isolated child. Our actions, which were overthrowing the modern world, were, so to speak, unconscious ideas that he had formed in those days, which he was formulating now to be carried out by us, simple as we were, and completely unsuspecting. And we thought we were the freest of spirits ! Were we, then, nothing but pale entities thrown off by his brain, hysterical mediums shaken into movement by his will, or were we, after all, creatures filled with dismay and nourished by his generous heart with his best blood ? It was like the birth of a human (all-too-human, super-human), a tropism or a deterioration, as Moravagine studied and contemplated in us his own double : mysterious, profound, in communion with the tip and the root, with life, with death ; and this was what allowed him to act without scruple, without remorse, without hesitation or doubt, spilling blood with the confidence of a creator, indifferent as God, indifferent as an idiot.

What could he have been dreaming about at those times when he remained motionless for hours on end, his head full of the maddest bustle and his chest heaving ever so gently ? It made me dizzy to watch him, and I suddenly began to be terribly afraid of him.

Since the night I had spent lying beside Mascha at the water's edge this was the second time I lost all self-control, the second time that the nearness of another person drove me wild. The first time it had been a physical revulsion that drove me away from Mascha ; now, it was a moral fear that drove me from Moravagine. I was in a state of indescribable anxiety, I was obsessed with the most funereal thoughts, and I was living in a half-trance when events broke in upon us with disconcerting violence and suddenness.

How can I relate what happened? I myself no longer know exactly how it all came about. My efforts are vain, there are simply great gaps in my memory. I can't seem to fit the facts together or understand how they managed to proceed one from the other. Am I even certain of all the things I'm about to recount? Was it really *Mascha* who betrayed us? Was it really *Moravagine* who impelled her to it? Hypnotism, auto-suggestion, or just suggestion? *Mascha* had barely been a week in the dacha in Terrioki. Was it possible that *Moravagine* had gone to her, unknown to me? Or had he employed some sort of remote control? One thing is certain, that our organization was suddenly wiped out and that all our comrades were liquidated in the process.

I still wonder how *Moravagine* and I managed to escape with our lives. The only solution is that *Moravagine* had thought of everything, and that it was, in fact, he who had engineered the whole business, and in no last-minute fashion. What can I believe? At any rate he gave me the most perfect proof of his composure and sanity at the precise point when I doubted him most completely and was least able to make up my own mind. It was also the only time when he showed how much my friendship meant to him, for he could have left me to perish like the others. In short, he saved my life. And in those days that still meant something to me.

Here are the facts, as I set them down in my diary.

'5th June, 1907. The latest reports are favourable. We have passed the whole night analysing them. Now we are burning them one by one over an alcohol flame, and listening to the good news that Katya brings back from her tour of inspection. Everything is in order. Everything is set to go. Katya has just arrived today from Kronstadt, and what's going on there is also going on at Reval, at Riga, Libau, Sebastopol, Odessa and Theodosia—all of which

were on her itinerary. Everywhere the great day is awaited with calm and confidence. All is ready. Our few remaining faithful partisans in the provinces know this is our final chance and are determined to act with all their energy. The news that the members of the Executive Committee are coming, that one of them will arrive in each city to head the movement and direct and participate personally in the action—this has had an excellent effect and has raised everyone's morale. Several units of the fleet are on our side. The enthusiasm of the sailors of the Baltic and the Black Sea is indescribable. Katya attributes this fortunate state of mind to our female propaganda agents who have been working on the crews and garrisons for long months now, and she pays tribute to Moravagine whose idea it was to send young girls and women into the ports and arsenals. Three hundred of them, mostly adolescent schoolgirls, daughters of officers or rich bourgeois, made their way into the bordellos. They give themselves to the sailors and thus obtain a hold on them, body and soul. The authorities suspect nothing, not a single house has been put out of bounds. Everything is ready. On our signal these women and young girls will board ship and lead the mutineers. The fleet is ours. Never have we held such a trump card. We can count absolutely on the garrisons of several forts. There is a great possibility that the mobile defence gunners will follow the sailors' example.

'6th June. 10.00 o'clock in the evening. A back-breaking day. All the infernal machines are loaded and packed. Held a last council this evening. The 11th is the Emperor's birthday. Military parades and celebrations will be held almost everywhere. Have decided to act simultaneously on the same day in all the cities. Each of us knows his job. Very heavy programme, but no hitches. We are to separate tomorrow. Z.Z. left this morning for Capri. A.A.A. will leave shortly for London. No further need of them here. Each of them will prepare his own sector (Mediterranean, North Sea), for we must leave nothing to chance and there

may be many fugitives by these two routes. Ro-Ro will leave us tomorrow morning. Tomorrow night he will be aboard the *Rujrik*. The infernal machine and the gas containers have been installed in the ship for a week in the coal-hold. Medvied, the chief mechanic, has telegraphed that all is ready. Ro-Ro has not one chance in ten of coming out alive.

'We've just this moment had a telegram from the Cripple. Mascha does not leave the house. She is closely watched. A female accomplice of ours intercepts her letters at the Terrioki post office. Thus, nothing to fear from that direction.

'7th June. 9.00 in the morning. I'm just back from Nicholas Railway Station. Everything went off well. Ro-Ro and his group are on their way. They took two first-class compartments in the St Petersburg express. Their eight suitcases contain twenty-five demolition bombs. English suitcases, flat, all of the same model, with great, glaring labels in two colours: "Company of Players. THE POPOV TROUPE." I am very uneasy but have no time to admit this to myself. My day will be a busy one.

'Midnight. Gostinyi-Dvor. The Institute is deserted. I was the last to leave, and have taken up quarters in the hotel. I am Mr John Stow, an English merchant. I am about to go down to the bar to get stuck into the champagne. I have a rendezvous with a high-priced young lady. I can hear the distant blaring of the orchestra. I climb into my dinner jacket and go down.

'The 8th. Six in the morning. I am wide awake. I haven't slept a wink. For nights and nights now I haven't slept. What should I do? What will become of us all? I carry out my instructions to the letter, but I am far from being as calm as I should be. My composure is gone, out the window. It's the first time that I have acted alone. I feel feverish. It seems to me that everyone must be able to see how I feel. Last night I got Raja, poor girl, ignominiously drunk. I made her drink so that she would not notice

my agitation. Women are too curious. I was afraid that she would ask questions.

'All the comrades left yesterday. Each one in his own direction, each one with precise instructions, each one with a load of smoke bombs, demolition bombs, gas bombs, hand grenades of the latest model, each one armed with a Colt that bulged in his pocket, each one with bank notes wadded about his body, each one with a bundle of passports. I wonder how the police let all this get by, arms, men, money, false papers.

'11.00 in the evening. All day I trailed about from museums to cafés to restaurants, I visited the Kremlin, I paid gypsies to play for me, I had a game of poker in the English club, I dined at the Bear, then went to the theatre, and here I am stretched out on the parquet floor of my room with my heart beating a triphammer rhythm and my head bursting with fear.

'There is a bottle of whisky within my reach. My cigarette burns the thick wool carpet.

'I am terrified. I am ashamed of being afraid. I'm still afraid.

'Tomorrow is the day I am to blow up the Institute. I have been saying this phrase to myself over and over all day, and cannot succeed in getting used to the idea. It's a simple matter of making an electrical contact; but will I be able to go through this motion? I will not have to leave this hotel-room. I need only plug into the phone circuit and at the other end of Moscow the Institute will explode, and perhaps a whole neighbourhood. Why?

'I am most uneasy. Moravagine left yesterday. It is the first time we have been separated. If he were here all this would be a game. I miss him enormously. I feel ashamed of the evil thoughts I have had about him these last weeks. Why was I afraid of him? How could I believe that he was going to betray us? He's a child. Mascha is a filthy bitch. Can he look after himself? He also has a heavy programme. I'm being very stupid. I reproach myself for

getting him into this business and above all for letting him go away alone—and I had sworn to myself never to leave him.

‘Tomorrow is the day I blow up the Institute. A simple contact . . .’

‘Have just had a horrible fright. The telephone bell, imperative, made me leap to my feet. I was all a-tremble. I drew my revolver, ready to kill the man at the other end of the line. It was Raja asking me to invite her to supper. I told her to wait, that I was coming down. Fine girl that she is. I shall not be alone this night. But what a scare she gave me! . . .’

The 9th. 11 in the morning. I awake inside the piano. My head is extraordinarily clear. The alcohol has rinsed me out completely. I feel rejuvenated, sure of myself. All my powers are at my disposal. I feel as if I could lift up the world by stretching out my arm. Raja is sleeping with her mouth open, her body caught under an overturned armchair. No, I didn’t sleep with her. But let me think: did I blabber anything to her? No, I told her nothing. All we did was drink and drink, then she dragged me home with her and as I went in I took a header into the piano. I couldn’t stay on my feet a moment longer. And I went to sleep immediately. Now that I’m awake it’s time to act, this is the great day.

‘Noon. I’m at the hotel. I take my bath and have my mail sent up. There are the telegrams, on a silver tray. I give a king-sized tip to the boy who brought them. The fact is, I would give all the gold in the belt I wear and all the bank notes bulging in my suitcase if I didn’t have to read those despatches. I am the party treasurer. I have never had so much money. Almost a million. What would I not give to skip over this day in my life!

‘A little later. I take lunch alone in my room. The telegrams are still on the tray. I don’t dare to open them, and yet I must, and I must blow up the Institute at five o’clock. This has all been laid down. Unless it’s countermanded.

And now this is the thing I fear most of all, something new, some obstacle or other that would hold up everything. I'm impatient to see an end to it all.

'It is a quarter past two. I still have a good two hours to wait. The contact must be made at five o'clock on the dot. I've opened my telegrams. All is well. Everything is going as we wanted, as we thought it should. I can proceed. Ro-Ro's message had been causing me the most anxiety. I read it first, for everything depended on what was in it. Ro-Ro's telegram instructs me: "Buy sauerkraut." I know what that means. I immediately send off four telegrams with a firm order for 100 barrels of sauerkraut in Tula, 100 in Twer, 100 in Riazan and 100 in Kaluga.

'Now I know that I must make the contact.

'The explosion of the Institute is the agreed signal for which all our comrades are waiting. The evening papers will carry it and the wires will be humming all through the night. Thus all our comrades and partisans scattered over the whole country will be advised that our plan is still in force and that they can go into action.

'Katya is in Kronstadt with Makovsky. Khaifetz is in Odessa. Kleinmann in Riga. Oleg is in Libau. The Cossack is in Theodosia. But Moravagine has not yet arrived in Sebastopol. Sokolov wires me that they separated in Khar-kov. What can that mean? I don't know what to think, and in any case have not much time left for thinking. I just have time to arrange my little installation in my room. Set up the batteries, attach the wires and make contact with the phone circuit. As I am very clumsy with tools I have not a minute to lose. Mora's telegram may come any moment.

'It's a quarter to four. I've worked like a slave and burned my left hand with the blow-torch while soldering a ground to the water pipe. The accumulator batteries that had filled my trunk are set up in the bathroom. The telephone dry cells are in the tub. The instructions of Z.Z. were so well written and his drawing so clear that I did not

hesitate for a second in stringing my electric wires. The pairs are bared, my clamps are ready. I will only have to twist together these two bundles of fine copper wire to make the contact. I drink a great gulp of cognac. Still nothing from Moravagine. I burn all the telegrams and other papers.

'Five to five. My watch is in front of me on the table. It is a stop-watch. The large middle hand even counts the fractions of a second for me. What to do for the five minutes left? What a multitude of things one can do in five minutes!

'I slip ten thousand roubles into an envelope for Raja. Good. The messenger boy has come, the envelope is on its way. Good. I lock my door. I have nothing more to do. My suitcase is closed and strapped tight. I'm forgetting nothing. I've left no papers behind. The electrical installation in the bath makes me laugh, and will give the detectives something to think about when it's all over. Who is Mr Stow, Mr John Stow? Mr John Stow is no longer of this world, gentlemen, don't trouble to look for him, he'll not reappear.

'As soon as I leave the hotel I shall be Matoschkin, Arcadie Porphirovich Matoschkin, from Voroney, a merchant, third class, member of the guild, going to Twer to take delivery of a hundred barrels of sauerkraut. Though I'm laughing to myself my heart is beating hard, my pulse throbs almost as strongly and my temples and the back of my neck hurt. Four minutes to go.

'I think of Ro-Ro. What a fine fellow, well brought-up, educated, calm, always composed. Let's hope he succeeds and gets away. And Mascha, what will become of her if we don't pull it off?

'Only three minutes more.

'The second-hand goes too slowly for my impatience and the hand showing the tenths is going mad.

'I count aloud.

'I'm all in a sweat.

'Oh, if only Moravagine were here ! I call him : "Mora ! Mora !"

'Silence.

'Where am I ?

'Is all this real ?

'I watch myself in action.

'And yet it's indeed myself doing these things. I am holding this wire in my right hand. This other wire in my left. One end is twisted tight and straight. The other forms a little loop. I have only to put the straight end through the loop and bend it back in a hook, then tighten the two with my little pliers and wrap them with insulating tape, and

'And

'It seems to me that I am about to blow up the universe.

'Blow the world off its hinges.

'It's too easy. My hands tremble. I almost made the contact prematurely. I insist on being exact. Five o'clock on the dot. My eyes follow the big hand which leaps ahead irregularly like a grasshopper. I still have one and two-tenths minutes.

'I think of a certain page in de Vigny's *Poet's Diary*. Z.Z. always said it could be done, that one could blow up the earth, destroy the whole world at one blow. According to him, one had only to drill to the required depth, place the charges at the correct mathematical angles taking into account the propagation of shock waves, distribute the explosions in a geometric progression from the Equator to the two poles so that the two polar caps were well filled by the two main explosive chambers, and then assure a perfect synchronization of detonation. One spark and the whole globe is in crumbs. Which would cause the moon to fall, dragging with it all the planets of our solar system. The repercussions of this explosion are felt to the very ends of the heavens and the most distant orbits are shaken. When everything settles down, harmony again, but a harmony in which the planet Earth plays no part. A.A.A., on the

contrary, said that no known explosive would be powerful enough to split the terraqueous globe; that one would need a mass of it at least equal and perhaps double that of the planet; that the latter, being made of matter, could not subjugate the forces of matter; that, constituted as it was according to the laws of physics it could not disturb the equilibrium of the worlds nor chemically annihilate molecular energy; that at the most the explosion would provoke a new precipitation suspended in the atmosphere which would continue to gravitate around the sun. It was true, of course, that life might well be excluded from it. He added that de Vigny's dream was no more than an optical illusion known in astronomy as the phenomenon of monocular diplopia. He maintained that to succeed in such an enterprise one would have to use an astral explosive, constituted, for example, from the last ray of a sun already dead a hundred thousand years, whose luminous energy one managed to capture at the precise moment it reached our eyes, isolating it, storing it by means of spectral analysis; that, condensed in the smallest volume industrially possible, the destructive force emitted by this luminous nucleus would be irresistible; that this pill would drive in a heap all the fulminating masses of the Milky Way.

'Seven . . . eight . . . nine . . . ten . . .

'My two wires are knotted together.

'What surgical dexterity in using the pliers !

'What a let-down !

'Nothing happens.

'I expected a tremendous explosion.

'I listen, breathless.

'Nothing.

'And I thought I was blowing up the world !

'Nothing.

'The lift is purring softly in the depths of the hotel and the windows rattle a little when the omnibus passes in the street below.

'I wait, breathless.

'A quarter of an hour has gone by.

'I grab my suitcase and run for it.

'I almost forgot my watch. It is five seventeen. I have just time to reach the station and jump aboard the train for Twer which leaves at one minute past six.

'In the train. The carriage is packed to the windows. Moujiks come and go, spit, pray, play the accordion, argue, drink tea. Some are even crammed into the baggage-racks. One of them stares at me with his ferret-eyes. I don't dare open the newspapers that seem to burn my pocket.

'Oh, what a time it was, crossing Moscow in a cab and arriving like a whirlwind at the station. There had been nothing unusual about the streets, and I was more and more convinced that I had failed in my mission. Suddenly there was a crowd rushing from everywhere. We had just started under the great gate of the Chinese city and were stuck there, unable to move. Seething and turbulent, the square in front of us was packed with people. The newsboys were helpless. Shouts. Arms stretched out. Disputes. Shoving and pushing. At last my cab was free and I in my turn managed to grab an armful of newspapers. Evening papers. Morning papers. Extra editions. A thousand shouts had told me the news already. I had succeeded. I stood up and beat the coachman in the back with my fist : "To the station, the station, a hundred roubles if you get me to the station!" I fell back in the cushioned seat of the carriage, exhausted.

'The papers, the papers. There they are. I've read them. I've had enough of them. But I would have read them even in handcuffs, with a policeman on either side of me, on my way to prison

'Enormous headlines. So many dead. So many hurt. Endless speculation about the reason for such a stupid, useless crime in the very heart of a working class neighbourhood. The firemen The soldiers Consternation Indignation I go to sleep.

'I wake with a start. What time is it? Eleven after midnight. Almost there. The papers? They're on the floor. I'm about to throw them out the compartment window. As I pull it down I feel as if I'm about to be stabbed in the back. I turn swiftly. An eye is watching me, sly, mocking. On the seat opposite a man is lying under a sheepskin. Thick beard. Cap over ear. Hair dishevelled. In his hand, which is hanging near the floor, is an empty bottle. This man is somehow frightening. I can see only one of his eyes. It winks. Who can he be? I know him. It seems to me that I have seen him somewhere before. I strain every nerve to think, but at the same time I feel my overpowering weariness. The empty bottle rolls across the floor. The man gets up, he steps clumsily on my shoes. The train is braking. We bump against each other. I get off.

"Twer! Twer!" It's raining. The wooden platform is slippery. Argand lamps, dim and useless, swing in the wind. The crowd disperses silently. I look for the stranger who was there a moment ago. I hurry towards the exit. My suitcase bangs against my legs. I have no strength left.

Now I know where I am. A crumbling path runs parallel to the tracks. At the second level crossing I go over the railway. A trail leads across the fields. I'm floundering through puddles. The rain begins to pelt down twice as hard and the wind whistles. After a quarter of an hour I reach a clump of elders. A carriage is waiting for me. I get in. The coachman whips up his horse. We do not speak a word.

'We are crossing a flooded plain, then we are in the cover of a forest. I submit to the tender mercies of this evil hack that jolts over the roots and sways with the wind. My mind is a blank.

'After an hour we hear the sound of baying in the distance. A light gleams among the fir trees. We're there. Ivanov leaps down. He takes me by the wrists, he grips them with all his might, and he asks, his face close to mine: "Did it work?"

‘“It worked.”

‘“God help us all.”

‘He loosens his grip.

‘He says no more. Neither do I. The wind is roaring in the trees. In the distance we hear the long cry of a lost train.

‘The rain is coming down.

‘After a moment I ask : “The barrels, are they ready?”

‘“Everything is ready.”

‘“You have the railway car?”

‘“I have two, two covered cars. They are on a siding at the far end of the platform, all by themselves. You can’t miss them, I’ll leave a barrel on the platform.”

‘“Good. Load the casks tomorrow and have the freight cars ready to leave. See to it that the first one doesn’t leave for three or four days. The second can go in five or six days. We mustn’t hurry, there may be a big crowd.”

‘“God help us all!”

‘A long silence.

‘Ivanov sucks at his empty pipe. The horse lets out a snort.

‘I ask him : “Ivanov, are you alone here?”

‘He replies : “I am alone.”

‘“And your workmen?”

‘“I gave them a holiday. They’re all in town, the day after tomorrow is a feast-day.”

‘“Yes, a great feast-day.”

‘“God help us all.”

‘He’s getting on my nerves with his confounded God. ‘Let’s get some sleep,’ I say to him brusquely.

‘Ivanov goes in first. He pushes the door with his *isba*.

‘“The dog is tied,” he tells me. “Come on in. I’m going back to Twer. You can sleep above the stove. It’s lit.”

‘I can’t stay quiet above the stove. I’m too nervous. What’s more, there’s bread, a herring and dill pickles on the table. But I can’t touch them, my hunger has left me. I

smoke cigarettes. I pace up and down. At every step the dog growls.

“‘Filthy brute!’”

“What time is it? My watch has stopped. I’ll never be able to stick it out in this place, waiting. Waiting for what? I’ll never find out here what’s going on, and I don’t dare show myself in town.

I pace up and down the room like a madman. The dog growls. I’d like to kill him. I can’t stand the idea of staying here.

The wind howls and the branches crack against each other.

I throw a log in the stove and stretch my legs before the fire.

Tomorrow is Thursday. The next day, Friday. The Czar, the Imperial Family and their suite board the *Rujrik* at nine in the morning. The *Rujrik* is a sleek cruiser tied up opposite the British Embassy at the Arsenal docks. The *Rujrik* is to turn, its stern still anchored, to catch the current and go down the Neva. At that moment, at a quarter past nine in the morning, the infernal machine is to explode. The boat begins to sink. Medvied opens the tanks of asphyxiating gas. Ro-Ro, from ambush in a ventilator that dominates the bridge, fires point-blank at the Czar. (Ro-Ro may be lucky enough to escape by jumping overboard and swimming to Vassilji-Ostrov.) The artillerymen of Peter-and-Paul, who are posted at the cannon that fires the noonday signal, bring all their guns to bear on the *Rujrik*. Their mission is to fire on any boat trying to leave or approach the cruiser which is now foundering in mid-stream. One gun may be used to fire on the Admiralty, another on the Winter Palace. A Maxim machine-gun clears the docks and keeps the British Embassy and all the palaces along the shore under fire. Another machine-gun, aimed at the interior of the fortress, pins down the guardhouse detachment and covers the approaches to the southern fortified curtain. In all, fifteen

men to do this job. Meanwhile six agitators (the leaders of Putillov's workers) capture the arsenal with the help of high explosives and smoke bombs. In the barracks, where all is in a ferment of excitement, the mutineers shoot their officers.

'At Kronstadt the revolt begins at 9.30. Here it's the torpedo boats *T 501* and *T 513* that open fire. They torpedo point-blank the enormous dreadnought *Czarevitch*, a flag vessel. The island forts *U.-21* and *U.-23* bombard the fleet lined up for the naval review at which the Czar will not be present. The ice-breaker *Novak* bombards the magazines and munition depots. Half the port is blown to smithereens. On board each vessel the handful of mutineers of whom we are sure take over command and raise the red flag. The marines take the barracks and the H.Q. of the district naval C.-in-C. By noon Kronstadt is ours. The island forts that have not yet surrendered are stormed. The submarine *Iskra* leaves on a scouting mission, a part of the revolutionary fleet follows her to give a hand to our comrades in St Petersburg, where heavy guns are still firing. Thanks to the sailors, St Petersburg may be ours by Friday night.

'In Riga and Libau the units stationed there can easily capture the port and the wet-docks. Under threat of their cannons the garrisons and authorities of these two towns give up. Here the dockers will be useful.

'So much for the Baltic.

'On the Black Sea Moravagine will be the first to score. Friday morning, early, Admiral Nepluviev will be assassinated as he leaves the citadel to inspect the troops drawn up on the Esplanade. Seven bombs have been made especially for him, for this old robber has been on our black list for a long while. We have condemned him to death seven times. He can't escape us. The battleship *Kniaz Potemkin* hoists the black flag. It at once begins to bombard the forts that have not gone along with the plot. It also fires a few volleys of shells at the Esplanade where the troops are

assembled. The mutinous forts bombard those ships of the fleet that fail to hoist the black flag at the first summons to show their colours. Some are under orders from the revolutionary headquarters on the *Potemkin*; the rest, commanded by Sokolov, sail for Odessa to give backing to the old coast-guard ship *Orlov* and the gun-boats *Batyushka* and *Matyushka*, which are supposed to take the fort by fire in the afternoon and keep the city under the menace of their fire. Theodosia is taken without firing a shot, Odessa falls some time on Saturday and Sebastopol at the latest on Sunday morning.

'In three days Russia's maritime frontiers are in our hands. The oil wells of Baku are burning. The Warsaw railway station is in flames. Kiev, Dvinsk, Vilna, Pskov and Tiflis are in open revolution. Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Finland, the Ukraine and Georgia proclaim their independence. Moscow is isolated. If need be, we shall march on it from all sides. With Moscow encircled what's left of European Russia will be ours in less than a week. A rail strike and a general strike are proclaimed. Already on Sunday morning all prisons and penitentiaries are thrown open.'

'There is persistent fighting all along the Trans-Siberian Railway, but only Vladivostock holds out, resists, digs in and becomes the reactionary centre, but that God-forsaken far-eastern city can have no immediate effect on our plans. We foresee pockets of resistance along the Volga.'

'I poke the fire. The dog growls.'

"Shut up, you filthy brute!"

'I calculate our chances of success. We can succeed, for everything has been minutely prepared and the men on our side are resolute and reliable. The two great efforts are St Petersburg and Sebastopol. But Ro-Ro is a man of action, swift to react and move, daring and unflinching. As for Moravagine

'Moravagine. I'm filled with anxiety on his account.'

What was the meaning of Sokolov's telegram? Why did they separate? If only he hasn't . . .

'But no. It's impossible. Even if Moravagine defected nothing would be changed. I've set off my little firecracker. Everyone has heard it. All Russia heard it. And now the good work is going on everywhere. Things must follow their course. Nothing can stop them now.'

'I'm mortally afraid. I get up. I begin pacing to and fro again. The dog growls and shows his teeth. He has crept in between two hogsheads and I can't even let fly a kick at his head.'

'I think of that strange-looking bird in the train. Something fishy there . . . That cap, that beard . . . that empty bottle . . . all a little too elaborate, smelling of grease-paint . . .

'And what if we were turned in? . . . if Ro-Ro were arrested? . . . if St Petersburg were a failure and only the provinces should revolt? . . . It would mean the end of everything . . . it would be frightful . . . we could never begin over again . . . it would all have been for nothing . . . useless . . .

'Useless! . . . ha ha ha! . . . Was what we were about to do really so useful? . . . No, not even Ro-Ro believed in it any longer.'

'And if we succeed? If our work is crowned by success? Then, ah, then we shall destroy everything . . . ha ha ha ha! . . . destroy even the Left. And then? And then? Some will carry our movement farther afield, others will even grow keen for an international movement, a new demolition enterprise. But we, the leaders, have we not had enough, are we not weary, tired? But in that case we would have to desert, abandon everything, leave our great work to others, to the free-thinkers, those who would follow, the second generation, who always adopt and take seriously other people's ideas . . . and build . . . and make new laws . . . and make new rules . . . a new order! Ha ha ha! No, after what we have done we can allow nothing to happen, not

even more destruction and certainly not reconstruction, reconstruction after our deaths Annihilation The whole world: that's our task, blowing up the whole world In the last analysis scientific knowledge is negative. The latest discoveries of science as well as its most stable and thoroughly proven laws, are just sufficient to allow us to demonstrate the futility of any attempt to explain the universe rationally, and the basic folly of all abstract notions. We can now put our metaphysics away in the museum of international folklore, we can confound all *a priori* ideas. *How* and *why* have become idle, idiotic questions. All that we can admit or affirm, the only synthesis, is the absurdity of being, of the universe, of life. If one wants to live one is better to incline towards imbecility than intelligence, and live only in the absurd. Intelligence consists of eating stars and turning them into dung. And the universe, at the most optimistic estimate, is nothing but God's digestive system.

'I throw the herring to the dog. He snaps it up and I go back to my day-dreaming. Will this night never come to an end ?

'God

'At this moment the dog rushes towards the door, barking furiously. I sit paralysed. Who could it be? I cock my revolver, I listen.

'The dog grows frantic. Outside, the wind howls, the branches crack. I open the door. The squalling wind engulfs the room. The paraffin lamp is blown out. I slam the door shut and stand behind it ready to shoot.

'Suddenly I hear a whistle, our signal, the theme from Tristan. I open the door and rush out, shouting: "Mora, Mora!"

'The gusts of wind are like so many blows. It's so dark I can't see one step before me.

'A voice says, "Hello there, it's me!"

'It's Moravagine's voice.

'A second later I'm holding Moravagine in my arms.

'I take him by the hand.

"The dog is tied," I tell him, "come in. You can sleep above the stove. I'll light the lamp."

'Is this the night of the 10th-11th or the 9th-10th? I don't know. I'm lost. Moravagine maintains that tomorrow is Friday. Can I have slept twenty-four hours without knowing it? That's what he tells me. Why? I don't know what to think. He's making a fool of me. But then why did he come to join me here in Twer? If he were running away the easiest thing would have been to go straight to the sauerkraut depot in Toula. But was he running? That's what I'd like to know.

'I must try to organize my thoughts and think back over the missing day.

'Well then: I bring Moravagine into the house. I hold him by the hand and push him near the stove so as to keep out of the dog's reach. Then I shut the door and relight the lamp. When I turn around, there before me stands the little manikin from the train. At the sight of this I'm so shattered that my revolver, which I had in my left hand, goes off and wounds Moravagine in the foot. It would have to be his right foot, the lame one. Luckily it's nothing serious. I've bandaged it up for him. The bullet went through his big toe, at the root of the nail.

'Moravagine is eating beneath the hanging lamp. His wounded foot stretched out on a chair forces him to sit sideways. The dog is beside him, and he gives the brute a crust from time to time. He made me untie it, and this monster that would have eaten me alive went straight to Mora to lick his hand. What kind of charm does he exude, that even animals feel it?

'Moravagine is eating beneath the lamp. I am ashamed of my clumsy revolver-shot. I boil up some Kascha. Rum-maging among the boxes and barrels I had come across the bread-bin, the stored pickles and a sack of herring. I also found a fat litre of vodka and drank a long draught before

putting it on the table. If I pretend to be so busy it's because I'm afraid to ask questions of Moravagine. I'm teeming with suspicions. The maddest possibilities are whirling in my head. From time to time I steal a furtive look at him. I would like to see through him, know what's going on, what he's done.

'I've had enough, his calmness is driving me wild. I can feel the surge of anger in myself.

'"You know," I say suddenly as I pour a goblet of vodka for myself, "you know, it wasn't a very good joke you pulled."

'"What joke?"'

'He didn't even look up.

'"On the train. Of course, I recognized you at once. You've no idea how that empty bottle smelled of stage-props."

'"Come, come, old boy, don't get on your high horse. Admit it, you were scared out of your wits."

'He looks at me, laughing.

'"In the name of God, will you tell me once and for all what you were doing in that train tonight?"'

'"Tonight?"'

'"Yes, tonight."

'"No, no, my friend, that was yesterday."

'His eyes are fixed on mine. He is smiling.

'"Now, look here, Mora, let's not play with words, please. Call it yesterday or today, just as you wish. But will you tell me what you were doing tonight at midnight on that train?"'

'"My dear fellow," Moravagine replies. "I assure you, you're mistaken. I wasn't in the train at midnight tonight. It was during the night of the 9th to the 10th that I had the pleasure of travelling with you, and without being recognized by you, what's more."

'"Fine. We'll agree on that. Now will you tell me what you were doing in the train tonight?"'

'"But you're completely mad, dear boy, on my word! I

repeat: I was on the train last night. And tonight, the 11th June 1907 . . . ”

“What!” I shouted. “Do you mean to tell me that this is the 11th?”

“I tell you this is 11th of June 1907, that it’s almost three in the morning, and that we’d be better to get a few hours’ rest while we can. I’m dead. And who knows what’s waiting for us in those whoring sauerkraut barrels !”

I was dumbfounded. I saw my revolver lying on the table and had a mad urge to seize it and fill Moravagine with bullets. What insolence, what a nerve !

He was vainly trying to stand.

“Come, old friend,” he said gently, “don’t make a face like that. Better give me your hand so that I can get to bed, for what with your damned clumsiness . . . ”

I helped him to get up and stretch out above the stove.

I threw a few more logs on the fire.

I wandered two or three times about the room like a sleepwalker, bumping into crates, barrels, the table, the chairs. Then, going straight to the stove and raising myself on tiptoe, I whispered in Moravagine’s ear : “In the name of our friendship, Mora, I beg you to tell me what’s going on.”

My voice was full of tears. He was sleeping, or pretending to.

He opened his eyes and staring fixedly at me he said : “Listen, my friend. We’re ruined. And now, go to bed, we don’t know what tomorrow has in store for us. Blow out the light and lie down. Good night.”

He turns his face to the wall and pulls the sheepskin over his head.

I stumble to a chair and sit down. I drink a goblet of alcohol. My hands toy mechanically with the bottle. It slips and crashes in a thousand pieces on the floor. The dog runs to hide behind the crates and boxes.

“It was Mascha, was it?”

‘“Who else do you think it might be?” Moravagine replies without moving.

‘The dawn is passing over the window-panes as if with a soapy rag. The glass is thickly fogged. Outside, a whitish mist, like the slimy track of a snail, drags itself heavily through the woods and sticks like glue to the fir branches. Above the forest a coarse rain is falling. Moravagine is asleep. So is the dog.

‘Upon my word, I’ve lost my bearings completely. I’ve just re-read the last pages of my diary. The dates and hours are all there. If Moravagine is telling the truth and today is indeed the 11th as he says, and not the 10th as I believe, then . . . then there’s something more seriously wrong with me than I had thought. I know that all is not well, for I can feel my fatigue right to the marrow of my bones. But still, sleeping for 24 hours without realizing it, without knowing it, that’s serious. Nervous prostration. A hiatus. An epileptic abyss. Concussion. A syndrome.

‘Yet it’s true that I’m bone-tired.

‘But when could I have had this long sleep? I’ve re-read my entire journal.

‘I must have fallen asleep at once on arriving here, just after Ivanov left. And in fact I did lie down above the stove. But I didn’t think I’d gone to sleep . . .

‘I can’t put one word after the other just now. I’m thinking about our comrades.

‘I’ve made some great decisions. We shall go to St Petersburg. Come what may. I have to know what’s going on there. I can’t stay another hour here in this uncertainty, and in the company of a madman. And if he doesn’t want to come along I’ll go alone. Better prison and death than not knowing.

‘Before I go to wake Moravagine, I swear in this place—and it is perhaps the last line of my diary—I swear that if

it's Mascha who has betrayed us, I swear that I will skin her alive.'

We arrived in St Petersburg on the evening train. During the whole trip Moravagine talked wildly. He had had no objection to coming with me. On the contrary, he seemed delighted.

'You must understand,' he said, 'when it comes right down to it, I'm not really sure that Mascha has turned us in, I don't know if anyone has. I don't know. I just said that; you know how it is? I had this idea in Kharkov. And that's what made me come back this way. But now I'm sure. You've no idea how women are. They love misfortune. They're only happy when they can feel sorry for themselves, when they really—but really—have some reason to feel sorry for themselves, when they can abase themselves and delight in it, frenetically, passionately, dramatically. And as they are all hams at heart they need their audience to play to, a public, even an imaginary one, before they offer themselves up as a holocaust. A woman never gives herself, she sacrifices herself. Thus she can always believe that she's acting according to a superior principle. This is why every one of them is convinced that we're doing her dirt, and calls the whole world to witness the purity of her intentions. The explanation of prostitution lies not in a desire to be depraved but in an egocentric sentiment that relates everything to the self and makes women consider their bodies as being something very special, precious, unique and rare; it's a matter of honour for them to put a price on it. This explains the vulgar streak that's to be found even among the most distinguished women; it explains the adventures worthy of a scullery-maid that the noblest females get mixed up in every day. As it's the woman's role to be seductive, she always thinks she's the centre of the universe, especially when she has fallen very low. The abasement of which woman is capable is limitless, like her vanity. As the paederast is the victim

of his depravity, woman remains the victim of her illusions and her vain daydreams of passion. Whence the drama, the eternal drama. And on top of that, a Jewess! *Mascha* needs a tragedy, a whole tragedy to herself. At bottom she cares for nothing. It's not us that she's out to destroy, it's herself. She wants to feel that she's the lowest of the low. And as she believed that she was different, superior to all other women, more highly developed, a creature apart, and as she finds herself outside all conventions with no guiding mark to go by, she is obliged to involve in her fall the thing she cherished most, the thing that gave her originality and provided any amusement she had in life. This is why she betrayed the whole party. Her Party, the cause, Her Sacred Cause, and with it Her child and finally Herself. You must try to imagine this inordinate ambition. She wanted a child from me so as to be able to abort it and drag me along in her muck and blood. You'll never learn all that she taught me. Now I know that the Marquis de Sade was an innocent. The greatest misfortune that can overtake a man—and it's not so much a moral disaster as a sign of premature old age—is to take a woman seriously. Woman is a plaything. Every intellectual being (and intelligence is a game, is it not? A disinterested game, that is to say, divine?)—every intellectual being has the duty to open woman's belly to find out what's inside, and if he finds a child, you see, then there's been hanky panky going on. You can see that I can no longer play with *Mascha* now that I've discovered her dishonour; and as her honour was not in herself, but situated where all these silly creatures place it, in her feelings of female vanity, she's obliged to prove, don't you see (and to whom if not to herself?—it's a question of self-respect)—she still has to prove that she is right, even in cheating, even in concocting her own downfall, out of sheer stubbornness, for she must be right at all costs. Whence her fury and her boundless hate. The Eternal Feminine, and I've torn off its veil. Isis doesn't like that.

She must have revenge. I think one must admit . . . ?

This speech came through to me only by snatches. I was too preoccupied to pay attention to it. For it happened that Moravagine was right. It really was the 11th. The train ticket with which I was fumbling nervously was proof. The date was punched in it. I saw light through the perforations. It was indeed 11th June, 1907. My every limb was trembling. What had happened this day at St Petersburg? What had gone on there since the morning? I got out at every station. I would have liked to ask questions. I didn't dare. I couldn't buy a paper, for our new passports stated that we were two illiterate peasants. They were signed with a cross. Oh, this damnable art of make-up and disguise which had so often allowed us to slip into the most hermetic assemblies to ferret out secrets, but which now prevented me from learning what was common knowledge! As I couldn't buy papers I boarded the train again with a few little bottles of Monopolka. And at these I sucked away. And Moravagine helped me empty them. And he started his long discourse again. And again I began to be afraid.

To be sure, we didn't cut a very proud or brilliant figure as we left the train, and it was perhaps this sickening drunkenness that got us safely out of the station. It was occupied by the military. Police were searching travellers at the exit. Everyone had to show his papers. But the police agents let pass these two drunken peasants, the larger of whom was dragging the smaller by the arm. Moravagine was staggering and could barely walk. He was limping terribly, and his wounded foot was hurting badly. Every step caused him to utter cries of pain which he stifled by biting his lips. His grimaces drew a number of clever jibes in our direction as we passed between the double line of agents.

The sight of the police had made my heart beat fast; and when we came out on the square before the station we sobered up at once. St Petersburg was in utter darkness.

Not an arc-light, not a gas lamp. Police road-blocks everywhere. We were driven back into Ligovskaya where troops were stacking arms. There were patrols of Cossacks in the streets. A great silence hung over the city.

Thus I saw once more that Moravagine was right. Our plot had been foiled. We had been sold out. We were betrayed. Oh, if I'd had hold of Mascha I would have strangled her! I shook with a cold rage. Now it was I who clung to Moravagine's shoulder for support. Without it I would have fallen.

From this moment on, Moravagine gave proof of an astonishing coolness and decisiveness. I put myself entirely in his care. My strength had left me. Nothing mattered any more. I felt only a terrible inertia and a total indifference to everything. We had made our way to the corner of the Street of the Peas and Sadovaya. We couldn't go on. The street was blocked off. Behind a barricade of paving-stones soldiers were setting up a machine-gun. At the far end of the street one could hear the distant shrilling of whistles, followed by a hurly-burly and the muffled roar of a crowd. It seemed that the police had isolated this whole neighbourhood, that they were searching the houses and arresting everyone. From time to time the sound of a revolver shot reached our ears.

Moravagine dragged me a little farther down Sadovaya and led me into a *traktir*, just opposite the covered market. There were three small rooms there, filthy, run-down, and full of people. Mostly street hawkers, coachmen and porters from the market, the little people who were prevented by this tragic night from carrying on their commerce. They were sitting elbow to elbow about the tables, square and round, and speaking in whispers of the events, as everyone does in Russia when certain things are mentioned in public; backbones give and bend, for one senses the menace of a nightmare hand, and terror hangs over all alike. As we entered, a silence fell, the shoulders huddled close together and the whole company there was crushed. Only a

shirtless drunk went on declaiming poems by Pushkin.

I slumped on to a chair. Moravagine spent a long time crossing himself before the icons. Then he put away a plateful of zakouskis, drank a big cup of vodka, went back to the icons, ordered a borsch, came and sat at my table, lit up his stubby pipe, cursing the while, crossed his legs and set off on a long monologue that all could hear, some story about a splay-footed horse and three horse-dealers who had tried to fob off on him an old hack with feet like milk-stools; he called the Lord to witness the life his wife would have led him if he'd come home with this brute, with its ribs sticking out like a woodpile, fit to make him the laughing-stock of the village. He recounted the latest news from his village and grew ecstatic over the fine things he had seen in the town. He waxed eloquent, tearful, cunning, mocking, and addressed himself in turn, with all due emphasis, to me (his bosom friend, his very brother, and here he would grow sentimental) and to an imaginary audience composed of the elders of his village who never wanted to listen to him (and here he would be carried away, grumbling, cursing, full of invectives and a plague on them all). Gradually other moujiks gathered around us. They began asking him questions. He replied by buying rounds of drinks. Soon the conversation grew as general, loud and confused as before our arrival. Each one began to talk about his own village. They were homesick for it. They criticized the city, their employers, the middle-classes. Then everyone began to complain about his work and what hard times these were. This brought them to the happenings outside in the street and at once their voices dropped. Each of them had witnessed some part of the events. They went back to whispering and the little groups formed again. Now we were no longer the centre of attention. Two peasants had come to sit at our table, an old coachman and a night watchman from the market. The drunken poetry-lover, for whom Moravagine had bought another drink, dragged up his chair as well. And our table soon

heard its own share of whispering, of rumours, of tittle-tattle. Thus we learned what had happened during the day by hearsay. And I might say that we were very well-informed, better than the newspapers, for the small man in the street has an eye that is ever alert, avid, insatiable, ferocious.

There had been no attempt on the Czar's life. But the annual Review of the Fleet had not taken place. All troops were confined to barracks. People said the sailors of Kronstadt had mutinied. It appeared there had been riots in Vassilji-Olstrov and that Cossacks had charged the workers of Putilovsky Savodi. In the city several barracks were under siege by police detachments. The Seminovsky regiment had shot their officers. The crew of the *Rujrik* had been arrested by the 1st Caucasian Regiment. The Guards had occupied the city centre. There had been mass arrests. The night-watchman had seen hundreds of prisoners file by, only a few of them students. The old coachman told of fighting in the Viborg section of town, and how the street leading to the Krestovsky prison was red with blood. The verse-loving drunk maintained that the Republic had been proclaimed in Moscow and that the whole Empire was given up to blood and fire, '... for,' he said, 'I sell the evening papers, and all my papers were full of blacked-out passages today!' The coachman replied that it wasn't at Moscow that the Republic had been declared, but at Helsingfors, for the Finland Station was closed to the public. The drunk, better informed, affirmed that the Black Sea fleet had sailed for Constanza, where the sailors had sacked the town. The night watchman said he'd been told that the Alexander gardens were full of dead.

And so the night passed as we went from table to table gathering confirmation of these events.

At break of dawn the coachman took us home with him. He was a fine fellow, name of Dubov. Moravagine had won him completely by promising to look no farther than Dubov's stable to buy his famous horse. I spent two days

in his barn, lying on a pile of straw, without going out. Our disaster was complete. Pyotr, the coachman's son, brought me the newspapers. I read the fatal news. Everyone had been caught. There were the names. Ro-Ro had been put in irons as soon as he arrived abroad the *Rujrik*. The uprising in Kronstadt had been drowned in blood. All our whore-house women had been imprisoned and the authorities had opened an investigation into their mysterious propaganda campaign. In the provinces the forces of reaction were everywhere in command. Katya, the Red Virgin, had been hanged aboard a dispatch-boat. Makovsky was in the jug. Kleinmann was on the run. Khaifetz tortured in an Odessa police station. Oleg prisoner. The Cossack executed at Kherson. Sokolov a suicide (jumped out of his prison window). The oil wells of Baku in flames. Warsaw ravaged by a pogrom. After one volley of shells which it fired at the city, the *Potemkin* sailed off at full steam. The latest is that the Rumanian authorities in Constanza have disarmed the flagship and thrown the deserting crew into prison. Nepluviev was killed by a bomb, but his assassin, Tchernikov, was shot down on the spot by the governor's aide-de-camp. Five other terrorists, armed with a new model of bomb, have been arrested in Sebastopol. I read, I read, I read it all. It's exciting reading. The author of the Moscow explosion is being hunted—some mysterious Englishman. That's all very dull. But there's one name that I look for in all the editions: that of Mascha. Nothing, not a word. And there is another individual of whose existence no one seems to have an inkling: Moravagine. What about that, now! My suspicions are aroused again. But I must be mad. While I'm here lying safe in my bed of straw Moravagine is outside, up and about. He is investigating. Dubov and he are inseparable. Under the pretext of buying the horse, Moravagine drags the old coachman around to all the dealers in town, through every neighbourhood, down every street. They drop in at every tea-house, and refreshment room, rolling merrily from bar to *traktir*.

It makes me wonder how Moravagine keeps it up. Dubov, for his part, has not had a sober minute. What keeps Moravagine going is the same anxiety, the same anguish that I feel as I feverishly read the papers. He wants to know what has become of Mascha. What she is doing. Where she's keeping herself. He's looking for a clue, a trace of her passage, and is finding nothing, not a whisper about her. And yet there is no doubt about it. It was Mascha who peached. It was Mascha who turned us in. Only she could have given such precise information to the police. She knew our plans, and had all the names of our comrades and accomplices. But why did she not denounce me? Why did she not prevent me from making my electrical contact? And why did she not include Moravagine in her denunciation?

On the third day I confided my uneasiness to Moravagine. It is dawn. He has just come in. He cannot fathom Mascha's attitude either. And as he tells me that he has no notion what has become of her, nor the faintest clue as to her whereabouts, I confess to him that I've sworn to kill her.

'Well, then, what are we waiting for?' he says. 'Let's be on our way. Maybe it's madness. Maybe it's just what she wants us to do. But let's go to Terrioki.'

We awake the snoring Dubov. We help him to harness up. He drives us to the Finland Station. But it turns out we're going nowhere. The public is not allowed in the station. We insist. A train has just come in. 'It's a military train,' the railway employee tells us. 'Full of prisoners.'

We turn to go. But we are quickly halted again. A long procession is leaving the station by a side exit. The prisoners march between files of soldiers with fixed bayonets. All the prisoners are handcuffed. We watch them parade past us. In the midst of them I recognize The Cripple. He is in heavy irons. A sergeant stays close at his side with drawn revolver. Among the women, who come after the rest, I see no sign of Mascha.

Dubov has gone to sleep, doubled up on his seat. Moravagine pulls him down from it, lays him beside me on the cushions and climbs up to the coachman's place. He exchanges banter with the *gardavois*. We make a fine trio of drunks, especially myself, pale as a sheet, trembling and half-sick from the sight of the prisoners.

'Well, are we off?'

I can't open my mouth. Moravagine whips up the horse. We roll away at a miserable pace, along interminable streets that are just coming to life. It's six-thirty or so, perhaps a quarter to seven. Where is Moravagine taking us? I don't care. I feel dizzy. I'm about to fall. Everything is in a whirl.

I open my eyes. We're stopped at an *izvoschiki* stand. We're at the back of the queue. It's Moravagine who's shaking me, getting me out of the carriage. He pulls me after him into a *traktir*. We leave Dubov sleeping on the cushioned seats of his carriage.

We must make our getaway. We can't stay in this city. We must forget about Mascha. Never mind, we have to leave. We must try to get abroad. We have to go back to Twer. Perhaps our sauerkraut barrels are being watched. If so, bad luck. It's our only chance. Maybe we'll make our way to London.

It's Moravagine talking. I agree to everything. I have no will of my own. Anything to have it all over with. If he told me to kill myself I'd draw my revolver in a second and put a bullet in my mouth.

I can't go on this way.

Misery, dear mother, misery and death!

The train was suffocatingly hot. The carriage was packed to the doors. Moravagine went to sleep at once. The wheels of the train clacked in my head and with every turn made mincemeat of my brain, chopping fine, ever finer. My eyes caught glimpses of vast expanses of sky, but the wheels rushed furiously in and destroyed every trace of it. They were turning in the depths of the sky, marking it with long,

oily streaks! These grease-marks spread, grew and took on colours and I could see a million eyes blinking in broad daylight. Enormous eyeballs were rolling from horizon to horizon, passing through each other. Then they all grew tiny, stationary and hard. A kind of translucent ectoplasm formed all around them, a kind of face: the face was my own. My face printed in hundreds of thousands of copies. And suddenly all these faces began to quiver, they moved, they made wild and ultra-rapid swoops like water-spiders on the surface of a pond. The sky grew hard and brilliant as a mirror, and the wheels, returning one last time to the charge, crashed into it. A thousand pieces of debris came whirling and crepitating and tons of cries and voices thundered down in an avalanche, pouring, unloading and telescoping into my eardrums. Zigzags, visions of scars, of fissures, of lightning-flashes, of lips, mouths, severed fingers; then a great explosion boomed out in the depths of my pain-filled ears, and Moscow fell back from the heavens in crumbs, in a rain, a rain of ashes like a dirigible on fire, disintegrating. Up and down, in all directions, bits of life went flying in somersaults, right side out, inside out, right side up, upside down, before falling back as dust: the Kremlin walls, St Basil's, the Marshals' Bridge, the enclosure of the Chinese City, the interior of my hotel room, and then, in slow-motion, Raja: vaporized and tenuous. She unravels. Her legs slide from under her in the splits and stretch out and out until they are dematerialized. Now nothing is left of her but a silk stocking suspended in the atmosphere, a stocking that swells out at the calf, becomes thick as a grain-sack, like an enormous, incredible belly. It is *Mascha*. She disappears in turn and a great baby made of blown-up sausage skin falls to earth and bounces gently there.

What? Eh? What is it? Oh. Oh! 'Twer, Twer!' Here's the station. What about it? Yes, yes, I'm coming. Here's where we get off. Get off. Yes, yes. 'Twer Twer!' That's agreed. We'll get off. So what? Look here, are you coming?

Yes. Shit. 'Twer!' Here I go. 'Twer, Twer!' Let me give you a hand. There. You know the way? Fine. I can't walk. Shit. Let's get the hell out of here. I'm with you. 'T-w-e-r.' Here I am. We're on our way. We've made it. Nothing to it. Let's get the hell out.

Railway tracks in the half-dark. The semaphores stand guard before the forest. We go over the second level crossing. We strike out across the fields. Go where I push you. We progress like toads, laboriously springing from one leg to the other, twisting our rumps, pulling one another along. Fever, thirst, fatigue, drunkenness, insomnia, nightmares, sleep, laughter, despair, indifference, anger, hunger, fever, thirst, fatigue—all these are hanging from our nerve-ends like too-heavy weights, and all the frail clockwork of our human machinery is out of order, our muscles grate on each other, madness tolls the bell, we have no control of our tongues, we trip over our thoughts. And in this state we have to save our lives.

I lead Moravagine to the clump of elders. The carriage is not there. Of course, that was another day. Of course. I made no arrangement with Ivanov. I'll find him in the town. We must go back to town. I absolutely must find him in the town.

I come to myself. Moravagine can no longer move. He is lying in the grass groaning like a baby. He is holding his foot in his hands. I undo his Russian shoe. The foot is swollen and the toe is quite black, I have no choice. I take my knife from my boot and, with all the professional composure at my command, I amputate the gangrenous toe. I do it very skilfully. Then I tear my shirt and make a bandage, tight, smart-looking, classic, according to the rules of the art. As I have no antiseptic I take care to piss on the wound, after the practice of the Amazon Indians.

This little operation has done us both good. We are lying in the grass, coldly taking stock of our situation. We must go back, and if our freight cars full of sauerkraut are still there, get in them somehow. This is our only chance

for salvation. If they are being watched, that's our bad luck. We'll be caught.

'Well, to hell with it, let's go. Can you walk?'

'Yes, my friend,' Moravagine replies. 'Wait just a minute or two. Let me smoke one more pipe and I'm with you.'

And away we go. We manage somehow. Moravagine has an arm around my waist and I give him a lift under his other arm. We're cracking jokes and laughing. But why is Moravagine singing? And what is the song? I don't understand the words. It must be in Hungarian, a song from his childhood.

We're almost there. We're there. We settle down on the other side of the tracks under the scrub birch trees that mark the boundary of the station yard, facing the platform. Our two freight cars are still there, at the end of a siding. From our observation post we can survey the approaches of the station. The platforms are deserted. Nothing stirs. The stars and the semaphore-lights are twinkling. The sky is immense. From time to time the scream of a bird reaches us from the forest. The lighted station clock shows three in the morning. We wait more than an hour in silence without perceiving the slightest ripple in the deep calm of the night.

'Shall we run for it?'

'Wait a little,' says Moravagine. 'Just another second.'

Then he adds: 'Tell me, old cock, how far is it from here to the freight cars?'

'About sixty yards.'

'That makes 125 paces for me,' said Moravagine, discouraged. 'Well, let's go. I'm good for it.'

'Your foot doesn't hurt too much?'

'No. Let's go.'

'Head for the first car and watch out for the wires as you cross the ditch,' I told him as I helped him to his feet.

Just as we were about to make our start for the cars an electric bell went off with a tired, thin, hesitant chattering

as if its battery were dying. The man pressing the button must be at the other end of the earth, it sounds as if this rusty buzzer would stutter to a stop any second, but it still keeps ringing, monotonously, endlessly, exasperating.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling, ting-a-ling, ting-a-ling-a-ling.

Again we take shelter in the grass.

A good quarter of an hour goes by.

'Oi-oi-oi, oi, oi, oi, oi, oi,' says Moravagine.

The dismal little buzzer is still ringing.

This is the end.

Now a door opens. A group of yardmen come out, spitting. Lanterns come and go along the platforms, signal-lights flicker on between the tracks. The switchman climbs to his look-out and causes the cables near us to clash and pull. A low rumbling approaches from the north, growing louder. Soon a train comes into the station. It's a long freight. The locomotive comes to a halt, coughing. Then it begins its shunting. They're detaching some of the cars. Then a group of men head towards the first car of sauerkraut.

'Look, Mora, this is our chance, we've got to take advantage of it. What luck !'

'Don't worry, I'm ready.'

We keep an anxious eye on our car. Six men are pushing it. They pass in front of us, back and forth, switching from one track to the next. Then they hook our car to the train, at the very rear. A man hangs a red lantern on the back of it. Then they all go away.

This is our moment.

We cross the tracks with all haste. I get there first. I break the seal with my pocket-knife. I slide the door half-open. When Moravagine catches up, I hoist him into the car and leap in behind him.

We're saved, we're saved ! I burst into tears.

'Silly bugger,' murmurs Moravagine, 'wait till the train pulls out, then you can go to pieces.'

He cocks his revolver.

No, no one saw us, nobody's coming.

After a moment the train begins to move.

Russian trains are not the fastest, and there isn't a freight train in the world that does more than forty. We've been under way for five minutes and it seems to me that we've gone thousands of miles, that we've passed the frontiers.

'You know, Mora, this is a keen little freight-car!'

'Talk about a *wagon-lit*!'

'And your paw?'

'It's killing me.'

'You got a fever?'

'No, but I feel full of tickling maggots.'

We rattle along.

After a moment it's Moravagine who says:

'Tell me, old buddy, what d'you think of this idea of going to see the Limies?'

'What d'ya mean whaddo I think? They're real princes, real pals. I've had a gutsful of these Russians and their bloody Russia. They give me the pip, I tell you. I never want to smell another Russki as long as I live.'

'Talk about mealy-mouths, theirs are full of it, they and their Great Whore, their sacred cow.'

'Which cow?'

'You know, Humanity!'

'Oh, that. They give me the colic.'

'What about if we crawled into our pits?'

'You're right. Especially as some busybody could come along.'

But we don't budge. We're too comfortable. Wonderful to relax! The train seems to be going twice as fast now. The wheels sing in my heart, they're singing the song of freedom.

We've just stopped in a station somewhere. There's been a bit of shunting. We could hear footsteps in the cinders all around our car.

'Moravagine, old boy, this won't do. We have to get a move on. If anybody comes we're screwed.'

'Shit. Tell me, d'you know the trick of these sons-of-whores of casks?' Moravagine asked.

'Don't worry,' I tell him. 'I know the beezness. It's cute. It's the sweetest you never saw. It was Z.Z. who figured it out. The greatest, kiddo, just wait and see. Talk about an ace, that kid was one of the best, and a real sweetheart too.'

Those casks, which Z.Z. invented, are very special. Out of every hundred barrels of sauerkraut ten are fixed, ten at each depot. There are four depots, therefore in a pinch forty people can climb into them and be sent abroad at great speed. The longest distance involved is an eight-day trip. The casks in Tula go to an agent in Brest-Litovsk, who sends them on to Copenhagen via Lodz and Danzig. Those in Riazan are addressed to a representative in Tauris, via Astrakhan and the Caspian Sea. Those in Kaluga are destined for Vienna, via Orel, Berditchev and Lemberg. Apart from the four addressees abroad and Ivanov, who is the sole shipper, the transit agents and correspondents are completely in the dark about the existence of the special barrels. Our lot goes directly to London, via Riga. It's the shortest itinerary of all, and there's only one trans-shipment. Loading and unloading can be very inconvenient for anyone travelling in a barrel, for then he gets rolled, jarred and ricocheted, and risks spending the rest of the voyage on his head. But all this has been thought of. Our barrels are carefully padded on the inside and an especially thick layer gives extra protection to head and shoulders. The barrels are very spacious, you can live in them in relative comfort. They can be shut from the inside by a lever which is within reach of the hand. This system allows for ventilation on the way; the lever is only pulled to during stops or trans-shipping. When the lever is locked the barrel is hermetically closed. At such times the traveller has two little rubber tubes at his disposal. Through one of them he draws air from outside, through the other he breathes out air that has been

used. It's important not to make a mistake, and it's rather awkward making use of these tubes, for as one is half-smothered by the fumes of the sauerkraut the tendency is to breathe normally. Above all one must keep one's mouth closed and breathe as slowly and regularly as possible. From the lever handle is suspended a little sack containing discs of pemmican, chococlate bars, a bottle of *crème de menthe*, a phial of ether and some sugar lumps.

'Y'know, old fellow, it seems th'first day y'almost die, but after that you're tickety-boo, you make the grade.'

'Just another lousy deal,' Moravagine replies. 'Are they off their nuts, these Russians, wanting to travel like molasses? Come on, light up so we can get some sleep. It must be almost five in the morning.'

In the dark I take off my belt and kaftan. From my left boot I take a little electric torch. I light it. Then on all fours I inspect the casks.

'Here, expose your peepers to this,' I shout. 'This one here. It's one of them, one of the specials. Here, d'you see the mark?'

I point to one of the casks and show him a number painted over the lettering.

'D'you get it? That's the sign, see? Now all you gotta do is pull out the nail, and the cover an' the whole shebang opens up. All by itself.'

I stand up to pull out the nail and open the cover. Still half-erect, I let out a horrible scream. My head has encountered something cold, something wet, flaccid and soft. It hangs over my head like a hood. Something sticky is running down my face. I take a step back. I aim my lamp at this floating thing hanging from the ceiling and swinging with the rocking of the train.

Every detail of this scene is still vivid in my mind.

The train is moving fast. We are jolted to and fro as it rolls along. We're standing among the helter-skelter barrels. Moravagine clings to my arm and leans forward for a better look. I point the beam of my torch at this thing

that's swinging above us. Holy God! A hanged man! No! A woman! Skirts . . . A hand . . . The narrow ray of my lamp makes holes in the dress. A muddied shawl. A flowered bodice. And . . . and . . . a head . . . a face . . . Mascha! . . . From between her legs hangs a grimacing foetus.

My outstretched arm falls slowly to my side. We say nothing. The train is jolting as if it would derail. My lamp throws a little luminous circle on the floor. Moravagine puts his foot on it.

'Mora,' I beg him, 'cut her down, get her the hell out of here, this maggoty cadaver!'

'No,' he says, his voice a barely audible murmur, 'no, I won't cut her down. She'll travel with us. She'll bring us luck. Don't you see, at Riga when they open the car they won't bother looking in the barrels, they'll be too busy with her. And we'll get through.'

Two barrels are open. I help Moravagine to get settled in his. He closes it from inside. I slide into mine. My bundle with its million or so roubles in bank notes is too bulky. I get out again and, taking aim at the dead woman, hurl the money at her head. Then I curl up in my barrel. I make myself good and comfy. I pull down the cover and close it from inside, pushing the lever hard until it locks.

The train rolls on through the night.

(1) Crossing the Atlantic

When you've left behind the hell that is Russia, life seems a good and pleasant thing. You are touched by the sight of people working quietly, and their fate seems enviable and comfortable. Even London, overpopulated, sooty and commercial, seems lovable. The man in the street, the man of leisure as well as the worker, precise, correct and self-contained in his sober elegance, is part of a well-ordered whole and keeps to his place in the team. What a contrast with life in Russia! The whole of English life is nothing but a sporting game, with its fair play, its laws and chivalric customs, and the whole country, raked clean, shady, green and mowed like a lawn, is nothing other than an immense playing-field whose boundaries are marked by gales of wind, planted like banners at its four corners. Around it, the sky and sea have the fat cheeks of children, healthy children, scrubbed children, rich children with new toys, sparkling locomotives and shining ships. The cities are like mahogany cabins where these two great babies sometimes come in to rest, and when they wake their eyes are clear, they babble happily and are the joy of their family which is England.

On board the *Caledonia*, which is taking us from Liverpool to New York, Moravagine and I never leave the private suite we've taken. Or if we go out, it's at tea-time, and we mingle with the children. We need to pursue the cure of innocence begun in London the moment we disembarked, after that frightful trip at the bottom of the hold; and a stay of three weeks in England was still not enough. We went up to Scotland, down to Cornwall, we wandered

for ten days in Cumberland, it didn't help. Lonely, taciturn and sullen we wandered, not burdened with remorse, but empty of all feeling. It wasn't until we were on board ship that we realized the superb curative properties of England, its soft climate, its atmosphere of innocence, the admirable behaviour of its inhabitants, the beauty and health of its children and of life in that country, and we began to miss it sorely. This is why we seek out the company of the little ones, to relax and comfort us. We're continuing the treatment.

We lie about the whole day. For my part I have no desire to go out, and it was Moravagine who discovered this five-o'clock cure, at tea-time, among children, laughter, all the nursemaids and one monkey.

Our apartment, on the port side of the top deck, consists of two bedrooms, a vast living-room, a small winter garden and a pool large enough to splash about in. The neighbouring suite is occupied by a German, Mr Kurt Heiligenwehr, known as Topsy. Topsy Heiligenwehr travels in every country and visits every capital in the world, where he stages a show in music halls with his trained monkey, Olympio. It's in homage to his companion, who makes a fortune for him, that Mr Heiligenwehr has taken the other luxury suite to starboard.

Olympio is a large reddish orang-outang. Whether he comes from Borneo or not, he's the most elegant creature aboard. It takes two Innovation trunks to hold his collection of suits and his under-finery. It is impossible to set foot on deck without immediately bumping into him. Early in the morning there he is in white flannels, in a coloured sweater from which emerges the collar of a Byronic shirt, his feet shod in suede, his hands gloved in chamois, playing tennis, shuffleboard or deck-golf. His attitude to his partners is icily correct. After a winning or losing round of these games he changes quickly. He puts on patent-leather riding boots with little silver spurs, a pink jockey's jacket, and, pulled down over his ears, a jockey's cap; then he runs to

the gymnasium waving a rhino-skin whip. There, he gravely mounts the mechanical horse or camel and does his best to regulate its steam-driven movements. When he takes to the sculling machine he wears a little pair of shorts that come half-way down his thighs, his torso is superbly moulded in a little jersey of transparent silk, and a great handkerchief in the American colours is knotted around his waist. Then he goes for a bath and swims like a man in his private pool. The rest of the morning is taken up by his toilette, between his valet who combs and perfumes him and the ship's manicurist, who does the nails of all four feet. Olympio, swallowed up by an ample bathrobe of flowered Chinese silk, relaxes voluptuously throughout all this. Towards noon he appears in the bar nattily dressed in a bright blue or pale reseda suit from one of the best tailors. His hat is slightly tilted, his new tie is decorated with a pearl; he has a flower in his buttonhole and light-coloured spats over his shoes. He leans on a cane with an amber head, smokes a fat cigar with the band still on it, drinks a cocktail, fiddles with the watch-fob that hangs at his belly, constantly pulling out his watch, looking at the time, making it ring. At lunch-time he retires to his suite, sits down at table, ties on his serviette and eats slowly, using knife, fork and spoon. After coffee he stretches out in a hammock, smokes gold-tipped cigarettes, reads the papers, absent-mindedly peruses the illustrated magazines and takes his siesta. On waking he rings for his valet and dresses again. He comes out with an astonishing selection of sporty suits with half-belts and multiple pockets. Now it's time for the promenade. He loves to make the rounds of the deck on roller skates. At other times, perched on a chromed bicycle, he weaves among the first-class passengers, tipping his hat elaborately. He can be seen in the evening in the corridors, grave as a diplomat, or lolling about in an armchair in front of the gypsy musicians in their tight hussars' jackets and following every move of a boneless Negro dancing a cake-walk. His dinner-jacket is starred

with decorations, for Olympio has given command performances before every court in the world.

But what Olympio loves above all is tea-time at five o'clock. When the bell rings there's no holding him. He leaps up, rushes to the nursery and is soon enthroned in the midst of the children at the centre of the great table. This is his finest moment, his time of gluttony and sport. He eats, drinks, stuffs himself, laughs, makes faces, plays pranks, flies into a rage, pulls the steward's hair, tries to eat all the cakes, lick at all the sweetmeats and steal from all the plates. The children scream with laughter and clap their hands, and Olympio grows even more excited. He springs on to the table, and from there to the back of his chair. He scratches himself, farts, belches, scolds, and, hanging from the ceiling head down, begins to undress. When his master appears he escapes through a porthole, half-buttoned, hilarious, his pants falling down.

Moravagine at once conceived a great admiration for this ape, and now after a few days it's Olympio, the orang-outang, who's training Moravagine.

It's Olympio who comes to get him, makes him exercise, takes him out on deck in the morning for interminable games. They swim, run, ride bicycles, roller-skate and play tennis and golf. I find their vigour irresistible when they burst into the suite like a windstorm, capering, chasing, upsetting furniture and breaking everything in sight until I can't tell if it's the man or the monkey doing the flying trapeze through the drawing-room ! I watch them for a while, burst out laughing and then I—the lazy one—get up to join their play, to be jostled and pushed fully dressed into the swimming-pool. Life is not so bad, and Olympio is a marvellous professor of the carefree.

We become inseparable. Olympio, Moravagine and I mix in with the other passengers. We make a tremendous trio, always up to something. The ape takes us to the ship's store and picks out for us three identical oriole-coloured ties not quite as loud as our hilarity over his choice.

Heiligenwehr spends the whole day in the smoking-room, plunged in his search for a never-ending run of successes. He's an inventor with a one-track mind, and he's making up new card-tricks. He's a quiet man whose conversation is studded with riddles, charades and puns. He'll come up to you and say, 'What's the difference between . . .' and he sets you a real poser and turns his back without even having smiled. He leaves his ape completely in our care.

Olympio dines in our suite every evening. We have champagne dinners. Real little feasts. When it's time for liqueurs, when our tongues are loosened and Moravagine and I begin at last to reminisce over Mascha, and all that happened in Russia, Olympio listens, half-tipsy, his legs wide apart, smiling beatifically as he alternately, with hand or foot, fumbles beneath his shirt-front and behaves very badly indeed.

(m) Our Rambles in America

To modern man the U.S.A. offers one of the finest spectacles on earth. Its busy machine-world makes one think of the prodigious industriousness of prehistoric man. When one dreams within the carcass of a skyscraper or in the pullman of an American super-train, one makes the direct acquaintance of the principle of utility.

The principle of utility is the prettiest (and perhaps the only) expression of the law of intellectual consistency envisaged by Remy de Gourmont. It's the principle that governed the dizzying activity of primitive societies. The caveman making a handle for his stone axe, curving it gently to give him a better grip, polishing it lovingly, was obeying the same principle of utility that guides the modern engineer when he builds a scientific curve into the hull of a 40,000-ton transatlantic steamer, bolting it inside to diminish resistance to the water, and incidentally giving this floating city a line that is pleasing to the eye.

Roads, canals, railways, ports, buttresses, sustaining walls and embankments, high-tension wires, water conduits, bridges, tunnels, all these straight and curved lines that dominate the modern landscape impose upon it a kind of grandiose geometry. But the most powerful force in transforming our contemporary landscape is beyond a doubt specialization in agriculture. In less than fifty years it has changed the face of the earth, guiding its exploitation with astonishing skill. It takes produce, raw materials, plants, animals, grinds and masticates and transforms them. Then it separates them and rearranges them. With no regard for the nature of a region it implants this or that seed, banishes

another, upsets this or that natural economy. Monoculture tends to transform the planet, or at least each one of its zones. Modern agriculture, based on labour-saving principles, and made easier not only by the help of animals but by ever-improving machinery (which, starting with the plough, has its culmination in the newest devices) this more and more scientific agriculture excels in adapting plants to terrain and climate and in giving the soil abundant and rationally distributed fertilizers. In relation to the superabundance of species that grow in nature, it cultivates only a small, though carefully chosen, number. Modern man has a need for simplification that tends to find its expression one way or another. And this artificial monotony which he takes pains to create, this monotony which is slowly taking over the world, this monotony is the sign of our greatness. It bears the mark of a certain will-power, the will to utility; it is the expression of a unity, a law that governs all our modern activity : the Law of Utility.

This law was formulated by engineers. In it all the apparent complexity of contemporary life finds order and precision. It justifies the extremes of industrialization, and, through it, the newest, most surprising and most unexpected aspects of our civilization reveal what they share with the peak achievements of the greatest civilization of all time. For it is thanks to this principle of utility, this law of intellectual consistency, that we can follow back the thread of human activity.

Human life, since its first appearance on earth, has always left traces of its activity. This activity was above all utilitarian. The concrete traces of this activity are not art objects but objects artistically made. In the debris of cooking-areas we find fragments of fashioned bone or shell; in the tertiary and quaternary strata we find chipped flint, polished stones, traces of paintings, rough-hewn statues; in tumuli we find hand-made pottery, moulded or turned, sun-dried or oven-baked, decorated by incisions or in relief with troches or lozenges, with colourful barbola or sober

lines, covered with abstract decorative motifs, full of invention and infinite variety and often containing the first hints of an alphabet; bell-mouthed pots, pots that are round or nobly tall and slim; all witnesses to a perfected technique, to a civilization already far advanced and to extraordinarily pure aesthetic intuitions.

These objects are distributed over every region of the globe; we find traces of this activity in areas now inhabited as well as on the surface of lost continents; this feverish activity of thousands upon thousands of generations, stretching over millions of years, is also the sign of a certain will-power, a utilitarian will. It obeys one single motivation, that of utility; and like our engineers prehistoric humanity formulated but one principle, that of the Useful.

In the last twenty-five years, under the pressure of certain problems posed by the natural sciences, all of them touching on the origin, formation, modulation and evolution of life, prehistory has taken shape. Zoologists, botanists, physicists, chemists, biologists, biochemists, mineralogists, astronomers, geologists, all are contributing to the birth of this new knowledge whose early conclusions are so astounding.

It sets the origin of life some 800,000 or 8 million years back. This unfolding of life took place at the North Pole and the South Pole. This first batch of life was cooked up by heliochemical reactions in the form of protoplasmic and protozoan manifestations, going on to the formation of plants and animals. **THERE IS NOTHING TO PROVE THAT MAN DID NOT APPEAR IN THIS ENVIRONMENT.** It is commonly supposed that civilization comes from the Orient. What nonsense! The creation and evolution of prehistoric human societies, the settling of the races in the various climates, the invention of fire, of tools and of the arts, the diffusion of religious sentiments and the flowering of the intellect, the great migrations that peopled the earth, all these things develop parallel to evolution, to the trans-

plantation and migration of plants and animals and the great cosmic shifts.

Now, just what does prehistory teach us?

There are two centres of intense life, the Arctic and the Antarctic. The polar caps melt away. Two currents of water rush north and south. The equator is flooded. Two oceans take form, spread out and deepen : the Pacific and the Atlantic. New continents emerge, they drift, merge—in the north, Europe-Siberia, in the south the Afroco-Brazilian continent. The great northern current is turned back (we can still find traces of it in the Behring current). The southern current still persists on the western coast of South America (it has been christened the Humboldt current). The water piles up at the equator. It begins to move. The water accumulated at the equator runs off, it runs off towards the Orient. Its enormous mass is attracted by the rising sun. The Amazon, the Gulf Stream, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea later flood Lemuria to form the Indian Ocean. It is at the source of the Amazon that we must seek the cradle of what we call prehistoric man of the Tertiary and Quaternary, and it is along the banks of this river that we must follow early human migrations.

Here we leave the realm of hypothesis to enter that of the possible.

Our world was populated from Occident to Orient. The stream of generations followed that of the waters, from west to east, attracted by the rising sun, as did the humble plant life, still humid and pale, which turned towards the birth of light, spreading farther and farther eastward, as did the animals, the animals and the birds, in their massive migration. The cradle of modern man lies in Central America and especially along the banks of the Amazon. It was from here that he left to populate the earth more or less as we see it today, according to the poet's lovely vision :

When the great river Amazon, coming from the West,
Flowed in the midst of Europe's and of Asia's land,
Bearing floating islands big as continents, overloaded
with mankind,
Like leaves of giant nenuphars swarming with colonies of
frogs

The cradle of modern man is in Central America. The campfire deposits, the shell-mounds of the Bay of California, the shell-heaps that stud the Atlantic coast, the Argentine paraderos, the Brazilian sambaquis are there to testify to this. These enormous accumulations of debris, piles of shells, of fish-bones, bones of birds and mammifers, big as mountains, prove that groups of humans lived here very early, well before the dawn of history And the present direction taken by civilization, from east to west, from Orient to Occident, is only a return to stage one. (This is what is known as History.)

This is why (since prehistoric man possessed art forms, since the caveman could paint frescoes which even today fill us with admiration and astonishment, since the Hyperboreans could engrave soft stones and whale and reindeer bones, make stunningly lifelike portraits of mammoth and aurochs and discover at that early date a graphic formula which is to drawing what stenography is to writing; since the savages of America, Africa and Australia could paint, draw, engrave, sculpt in stone and wood, build huts, temples and forts, sing, dance, make music, make up stories and transmit them orally from the very darkness of time, devoting themselves to a dizzying artistic activity which we still despise but can no longer ignore)—this is why the white race, disembarking in America, discovered as in a single flash the sole and unique principle of human activity, the principle that educates and subjugates: the principle of utility. From that moment on, the white man knows only one dogma: work, anonymous, disinterested work, which is to say *Art*.

On hearing of this, the old cathedral-peoples (the old countries of Europe) awake, are resurrected, regain consciousness, let fall their shackles : libertarian Ireland, imperialist Italy, nationalist Germany, liberal France, Russia, that immense Russia which attempts to create a synthesis of Orient and Occident by reconciling the pacific communism of Buddha with the virulent communism of Karl Marx. From the other side of the ocean new countries, any one of which is larger than several countries of Europe and some of which are larger than all Europe put together, turn their backs, disillusioned, on the too-narrow formulas of the old world. Even in the most peaceful, the most neutral, the most inaccessible States one hears the sound of rot giving way : the struggle among faiths; consciences in conflict; new religions stuttering into life; old ones changing skins; theories, fancies and systems everywhere grappling with the principle of utility. We no longer look for an abstract truth but for the true meaning of Life. The human brain has never before had to carry such a current of high-tension ideas. The classical formulas are insufficient, not only in art but in politics and general economics. Everything is cracking, giving way, the most time-honoured stays of society and the most audacious experimental scaffoldings. In the forge of a war of liberation and on the sonorous anvil of the press the whole framework of the body politic is being recast and forged anew.

In this apparent disorder one form of society asserts itself, dominating the tumult. It works, it creates. It transforms all values by its practice of Crash and Boom. It has been capable of rising above contingencies. No classical theory, no abstract conception, no ideology could have foreseen it. It is a formidable force which nowadays embraces the whole world, fashions it and moulds it : modern heavy industry in the form of capitalism.

A Limited Company, anonymous.

It has made use of nothing more than the principle of utility to give the innumerable peoples of the earth an

illusion of perfect democracy, of happiness, equality and comfort. Seaports are angular, roads are flat and straight, cities are geometrical. There are canals and railways and finally bridges, bridges in wood and steel, suspended from steel cables. Cube-shaped factories, terrifying machines, a million funny little gadgets that do all the housework. At last we have time to breathe. Automation penetrates daily life. Evolution. Geometric progression of progress. Strict application of an integral law, a law of consistency, the principle of utility, for the engineers who have rediscovered this norm admit no criterion in this social evolution they're pushing other than the principle of utility. Every day they are creating new machines. Their lines are pure, no salients, only long solid surfaces instead of tremors and curves : simple, elegant, clean. These characteristics also call for the use of new forms and specially adapted materials: alloyed steel, fibrous glass, nickel and copper bars which marry well and quickly. Blinding lighting-systems. Jointed drive-shafts, crouching chassis, converging lines, water-drop profiles, four-wheel brakes, precious metals in the motors, new materials in the body, large, smooth surfaces : neatness, sobriety, luxury. There's nothing to remind us of the horse-drawn carriage. This is a new combination of lines and forms, a true work of plastic art.

Plastic.

A work of art, an aesthetic work, an anonymous work, designed for the mass, for all men, for life itself, logical conclusion of the principle of usefulness.

Just look at this early aeroplane, whose volume, aerofoil, form, line, colours, material, weight, angles and incidences all are meticulously calculated, the product of pure mathematics. It's the most beautiful possible projection of the human brain. And it's not made to look at in a museum : you can climb in and fly away !

The intellectuals haven't caught up yet, the philosophers still don't realize it, the upper and lower middle classes are too pedestrian to notice, the artists live a life apart, only

the immense worker population was really there when the birth of these new forms of life became an everyday thing. They worked to bring them forth, helped in their distribution, adapted to them at once, climbed on the seat, took hold of the wheel and, despite the cries of horror and protest, drove away in these new forms of life at top speed, making havoc of flower-beds and of the categories of time and space.

The machines are here, with their fine optimism.

They are like a prolongation of the herd personality, the realization of its most intimate thoughts, its most obscure tendencies, its most powerful appetites; they are its sense of orientation, its highest form, its equilibrium, not external realities endowed with animistic faculties, not fetishes, not superior animals.

To the American people belongs the honour of having rediscovered the principle of utility in its innumerable applications, the most elementary of which have already upset the applecart of life, of thought and of the human heart.

Pragmatism.

A disc is no longer a circle: it becomes a wheel.

And the wheel goes round.

It gives birth to drills, titanic shafts, monstrous tubes 32 feet long with a 90 centimetre bore.

Its prodigious labours make relatives of countries geographically and historically foreign to each other by making them resemble one another: Aden, Dakar, Algiers: ports of call; Bombay, Hong-Kong: trans-shipping ports; Boston, New York, Barcelona, Rotterdam, Antwerp: outlets for industrial regions. The caravans of 10,000, of 15,000 camels that lined the trails of Timbuktu with a pay load of 1,500 tons are replaced by cargo ships of 20,000 tons jamming ports imposed on a nasty piece of coastline, and in eight days the 20,000 tons of goods reach the ancient market by raft, motor-boat and trailer-trucks, by rail, by caterpillar, by air.

And the wheel goes round.

It engenders a new language. Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, our friend Charles-Albert Cingria, Herr Schoen of the Deutsche Bank, Monsieur Emile Lopart of the Joint Steel Works, General Olifant and his attendant suite, de Koelke the importer, along with workers, merchants, civil servants, colonists, and thousands upon thousands of other customers take to the black and pink steamers, or all white, or green and red, or all yellow, or grey and blue, belonging to the Holland America Line, or the Canadian Pacific, or Favre & Co, or Nippon-Yousen-Kaisha, or P.M., or T.K.K., or White Star, or New Zealand Shipping, or Lloyd Sabaudo, or Veloce, Norddeutsche Lloyd or Tchernikovskaya Kommerskaya Flott, or even the Fraissinet Packet or the Chargeurs, and set off from Victoria for Hong Kong (*4283 miles in ten days*) or from San Francisco to Sydney via Honolulu and Suwa, Auckland and New Guinea, or from Rotterdam, Antwerp, Hamburg, Dunkirk, Bordeaux, Marseilles, Lisbon, Genoa, to Quebec, Halifax, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Vera Cruz, Caracas, Rio, Santos, La Plata ; while in Djibouti, amid shouting and moonlight, the enormous tarpaulins of the Thursday courier head for Mombasa, Zanzibar, Mayotte, Mazunga, Nossihé, Tamatave, La Réunion, Mauritius ; and in Dakar, in the bright sun and amid the thudding jostling of heavy barques, the Wednesday morning courier sails for Konakry, Grand Bassam, Petit Popo, Grand Popo, and Libreville.

Yes, in all this tremendous industry, amid all this cotton, rubber, coffee, rice, cork, peanuts, these litanies of Pustet, this pig-iron, this 2/10ths wire, these sheep, these canned goods, these crates of chickens, this fridge, these Sacred Heart medals, these Liszt rhapsodies, this phosphate, these bananas, these steel beams, the language—of words and things, of discs and runes, Portuguese and Chinese, numbers and trade marks, industrial patents, postage stamps, passenger tickets, bills of lading, signal codes, wireless radio—the language is refashioned and takes on body,

this language that is the reflection of human consciousness, the poetry that makes known the image of the mind conceiving it, the lyricism that is a way of being and feeling, the demotic writing stimulated by the cinema which speaks to the impatient mass of the illiterate, the papers which bypass grammar and syntax in order to give the eye a more striking picture in the typographical make-up of their advertisements, the touching price beneath a tie for sale in a window, the multi-coloured posters and the giant letters that prop up the hybrid architectures of the cities and straddle the streets, the new electrical constellations that climb each night into the sky, the alphabet-book of smoking chimneys in the morning wind.

Today.

Profundity of today.

Everything is changing proportions, angle, point of view. All things rush away, rush in again, accumulate, become scarce, laugh, insist and grow exasperated. The products of the ends of the earth find their way on to a single plate or into a single dress. We feed on the sweat of gold with every meal, with every kiss. All things are artificial and real. The eyes. The hand. The immense fur coat of figures in which the banks sprawl and revel. The sexual fury of the factories. The wheel that goes around. The wing that glides. The voice that travels on a wire. The ear in a paper cone. Orientation. Rhythm. Life.

All stars are twins. If the mind staggers at the thought of something infinitely small which we have just discovered, how can the heart fail to be shattered by the same discovery?

(n) The Blue Indians

I'll never forget the inauspicious circumstances under which we left New Orleans, barely a week after we arrived there. We had taken the train from San Antonio, Texas, to attend the wedding of Lathuille.

Lathuille was our factotum.

Valet, servant, man of all trades, this Lathuille was a strange piece of work, word of honour. He had joined us in Wyoming, picking us up on the platform at a little station near Cheyenne and introducing himself as a guide to the Yellowstone National Park. He had a pretty interpreter's hat on that morning. He was a Frenchman, born I think in Morbihan, and his first name was Noël.

We had by then made the tour of almost every state in the Union. Lathuille didn't take long to figure out that our touring consisted above all of avoiding big cities, big crowds, and continental trains with police aboard, from which he concluded, with a mind as perspicacious as it was rapid, that the as yet little-frequented territories of Arizona might interest us. He at once proposed to guide us through the South-West to study the natural curiosities and visit the Indian reservations near the border. Lathuille, arrant rascal and all, had a mighty persuasive gift of the gab, and he explained the desirability of this trip with such warmth, painting such a grandiose picture of a life of adventure in the desert, depicting the Indians in such an idyllic light with their wives and children singing, dancing, producing a strange and exotic music from flutes of all sizes on the roofs of their crumbling huts atop high sand cliffs, that we were easily convinced. In fact, we would have made up our

minds with less persuasion. Moravagine and I were tired of the life we had been leading. We had wandered everywhere with no particular goal in mind, and though we were unknown and lost in this immense land, the United States, our aimlessness itself made us noticeable. People had already asked us indiscreet questions aboard trains and boats; just as in Russia, we were forced to use different names in every hotel and new disguises in every city. This game of hide-and-seek couldn't go on. This was why Lathuille's proposal found us in instant agreement. Disappear. Live in the open air. Disappear in virgin country. Moreover, Lathuille had tactfully let us know, without insisting too much, that he could easily smuggle us across the border with the help of a few faithful friends. He also dropped a few hints about a gold-mine, an excellent investment. A little later he muttered something about a diamond-field.

Three days after we met him we had surrendered to him. A week later, we couldn't get on without him. He was indispensable. He set up camp, looked after the horses, hunted, did the cooking. What a pleasant companion! Amusing, obliging, gay, always happy, and as active and devoted as he was talkative.

Moravagine rode ahead with him while I brought up the rear. The three of us went down the Colorado by short stages. There was no hurry. Lathuille chattered.

If one could believe him, he had seen everything, read everything, done everything. He had worked in every trade, tramped the whole world over, had friends everywhere. He had lived in all the great cities and been through several virgin countries, accompanying explorers or acting as guide to scientific expeditions. He knew houses by their numbers, mountains by their height, children by their birthdays, boats by their names, women by their lovers, men by their vices, animals by their virtues, plants by their healing qualities and the stars by their influence. He was superstitious as a savage, sly as a monkey, up-to-date as a man about town,

and unscrupulous and cunning into the bargain.

With time I grew a little suspicious of him. What was he getting at with all his yapping, and why had he, one day, addressed me as 'Monsieur l'Anglais', winking as he said it? (But did he really wink? Or was I simply too touchy, unable even here in the solitude of this plateau of the Colorado to forget the Englishman of Gostinyi-Dvor?)

It was silly, after all, to get excited about this. Lathuille was nothing but a simple swindler, for the farther south we went the more his chatter revolved around his gold-mine in which we were to be partners. He talked about it day and night, during the long day on horseback and far on into the dark when, bedded around the fire, our heads pillowled on our saddles, we had demolished our salt pork and beans and were smoking the thick cigars of the south-land. The sky was dark. Our hobbled horses nibbled at the grass around us.

'My gold-mine, the Common Eagle—not the Big Stone (we'll be there in forty days, the frontier where my good friends are waiting for us is only two days farther on, it's easy to cross, you'll see)—my gold-mine is in a high valley of those lost mountains which no European has ever seen. To reach it you climb steep slopes and come out in a sandy basin where nothing green can grow. (An interesting insect in that part of the country is the honey ant; the natives are mad for it; it's a well-known aphrodisiac.) This desert is enclosed by chalky sandstone cliffs that stand absolutely naked. As you come closer to these arenaceous masses you discover, high above you, houses perched among them, and then humans, who are always in a frenzy of excitement at the approach of a stranger. There is no way up but a narrow path cut in the cliffside (you climb it to the strident call of flutes, there are tubes 15 feet long that make your head turn on your shoulders) and then you emerge among the Vallataons, called Jemez Indians by the Mexicans. The settlement has a Catholic church (an *estoufa* in the native

tongue). The church is empty and half in ruins. It is dedicated to Montezuma, and in it a perpetual flame is kept burning in expectation of Montezuma's return, at which time he is to establish his universal empire. On the church walls are paintings of Indians hunting deer or bear and an immense rainbow whose ends rest on two chairs, with the sun and a bolt of lightning splitting the air. Behind the church there is a view far to the south revealing three mountains which the Indians call Tratsitschibito, Sosila and Titsit-loi (they are more than 10,000 feet high). Mammoth fossils have been found nearby. The aged Spanish priest who undertook these excavations (he's an old lecher, by the way, and he's the one who owns my gold-mine and wants to sell it, but I've got a better proposition for you, there's a diamond-field a little farther on, the other side of the mountains, two days ride from Stinkingsprings in Touha Indian territory, their chief god is the sun, they call up a wind with a shout that goes *a-ah-a, hee-ee-ee*, and make the rain fall by whistling *oo-oo-oo*). The old priest of the *estoufa* took me by the hand one day and said, "*Me gusta mas el oro que los huesos!*" Then he led me into a narrow canyon with perpendicular walls. Shards of brilliantly coloured pottery were heaped at the feet of the cactus plants all along the dried-up river-bed. An eagle soared high in the air and the walls of the cliff were riddled as far as the eye could see with holes, openings and slits, and covered with hieroglyphic inscriptions in ochre, yellow and blue. A horde of Indians, suspended by liana cords, hung in the abyss. They swarmed in the sunlight like a colony of flies. They climbed and descended with astonishing rapidity. They went in and out of the holes, cracks and openings of the mountain and inspected every irregularity in the rock. From time to time one of them would reappear with something round in his arms. He would swing for a moment by his cord, twisting in the air and waving his legs to stabilize himself, then with a sweeping gesture he would hurl down the object he held. A giant urn would

come crashing in pieces at our feet. From the fragments a huddled mummy would appear, blackened bones and golden plaques as big as your hand. Pure gold, you understand, not quartz and not dust, but purified gold. Buy my mine and we'll share. You must see what I mean, you must understand I'm not selling you shares (I had ten thousand certificates engraved in Denver City, a hundred thousand shares at a dollar each, but there are too many formalities to go through before you can get rid of any of them, I've got the whole lot in my saddle-bag and I light the fire with them every night, and anyway there's the engraver and the paper to pay and I haven't a sou)—anyway, it's not paper I'm selling you but gold, the very gold of that old priest, *es muy antiguo, tiene mas de ciente y veinte años*. All we have to do is finish him off. He's a lecherous, miserly old bastard (I don't know where he keeps the stuff but we'll warm his feet for him until he talks, just as they do back home in France, or we can get the Indians drunk and hang the padre); let's say there are a hundred loads of it; it's my gold, I'll split with you; I only ask that you buy burros from the Indians (*burros bravos*, wild donkeys who'll go anywhere and who'd eat bricks or even the wooden paving blocks of the boulevards, they're fine beasts) and we'll go across at Ojos Calientes into Mexico and not meet a soul (of course I'll leave my friends in the lurch, they're expecting me farther down to the east, Ojos Calientes is to the west). We'll stay out of the forest region and take to the mountains where you can find water-holes with a little green growth around them. It will be rough going, but never worry, I'll see you safely through. We'll take ship at Guyamas (there's a little stretch of railway, I worked building the track)—I know the place well. From Guyamas to Maxatlan there's a coastal steamer that makes the crossing.'

We arrived at Common Eagle on the feast of San Pedro. The Indians, though they had abandoned the Catholic Church, still observed this feast. They were just celebrating

it with horse races in the streets of the town. The women stood on the roofs and squirted water on the jockeys running last.

The old Spanish padre was dead, dead and buried. The Vallataons hadn't seen a white man for more than three years. We stayed with them almost six months : I, restless, depressed, busying myself with collecting shards of pottery in the valley of tombs, and, for lack of anything better to do, putting together a vocabulary of the Jemez dialect; Moravagine, opening with bent pins the bellies of honey ants and sharing his pickings with little Indian girls on the verge of puberty. Shrilly they would wrangle over an insect which had surrendered his honey with his bowels but went on feebly moving his head and legs; Lathuille, rummaging everywhere, digging holes and trenches, turning the church inside out, spending whole nights in magical ceremonies along with an old blind chief and a leprous child but nowhere succeeding in laying hands on the buried treasure of the old priest.

We had brought along a healthy stock of alcohol, enough to load twenty pack-animals—sixty demijohns of five gallons each and Lathuille was not sparing with it. Ever since our arrival it had flowed in streams. Men, women and children gave themselves up to a veritable orgy, and now, to earn the last drops of brandy, they were demolishing the ruined walls of the *estoufa*. Occasionally one of them would pour a goblet of alcohol on the perpetual fire; then the flames leapt up to lick the stones of the hearth, the three sacred stones of the hearth, last vestiges of the ancient tabernacle of Montezuma, and the whole village danced around them in delirium. But despite the shouts, the dancing, the chanted invocations, the ritual rounds, the magic flutes more intoxicating than alcohol, despite the infernal cauldron of the old blind man and the prophecies of the leprous child, despite all this sorcery, the gold remained undiscoverable.

In the village famine set in. The Indians grew menacing.

An epidemic of glanders decimated our mounts and pack animals. One morning, our supply of fire-water exhausted, we broke camp.

We were fugitives.

We followed the razor-backed crests (*cuchillas*) and scrambled down rugged slopes, our horses proceeding laboriously in the rounded sandstone pebbles that cluttered the narrow passes and lay thick in the beds of dried-up torrents. After fighting our way through impossible defiles we came out on a plain that had been left riven, crevassed and tumescent from successive erosions. There were great towers of sand and clay. Over a huge distance the terrain was eaten away, slashed, cracked, slit open. There were long stones standing on end and horizontal stones lying on frail pillars of rubble. Festoons and stalactites and tusks of obsidian hung above our heads, our horses stumbled over the cutting ridges, needles and saw-teeth that bristled in the soil. Then the trail led us on to powdery, barren savannas where an occasional yucca plant shot forth its dagger-sharp leaves.

And we had the Vallataons at our heels. For more than three weeks they harassed us with the little pointed darts of their blow-tubes, for more than three weeks we were tormented by the sound of their flutes. Yes, their flutes. They hooted, whined and squeaked behind us, they scolded through the gorges and defiles, they thundered in the rock-encircled arenas, surging over us, redoubled by a thousand echoes. Before and behind us, to left and to right of us and all around, a million furious voices trailed us, troubled us, menaced us, giving us no rest day or night. In all this sand, amid these crumbling stones, it seemed that each stumbling footstep raised a storm of sounds, a gust of crepitations that fell back on us in the form of maledictions, screams, sobs, imprecations and howls of delirium. War-flutes bombarded us, others burst like shrapnel and forced us to duck our heads, others, less powerful, cooed piteously and made us turn to look, the shrillest wounded our ears to

the quick, the hollowest struck us point-black and stopped us in our tracks. Certain cadances afflicted us with vertigo. It was enough to drive one mad. We rode in circles. Our trembling horses bolted. They, like us, had lost their minds. We suffocated from thirst and the sun, going off like a gong, made every stone of this desert cry out and the endless stretches of the savanna resound like a tom-tom.

Our temples throbbing, we advanced without even daring to fire a gun, shedding all our impedimenta, boxes, pack animals and even our last gourd of water. What with all the turning, going ahead, back-tracking, climbing up, climbing down, we no longer had the faintest notion where we were in this labyrinth of corridors, defiles, peaks, promontories, mountains, plains, ridges, spines, valleys and knolls. Our mounts died under us and we rode on astride our own shadows. Tiny, shrunken, we struggled on under the high noonday sun and were still marching, dwarfed and stunted, under the moon's great disc amid holes of shadow and lighted humps.

At last the pursuit slackened. The Vallataons had reached the black stones that mark the border of their territory. We cut obliquely across a plain whose soil was barely visible under heavy clouds of sulphurous steam. Screech-owls flew up every hundred yards. The final gasping of the flutes came to us like the distant rumble of a volcano. Eleven days later we were in El Paso, El Paso del Norte, where we took the train for San Antonio.

It was in San Antonio, Texas, that Lathuille first mentioned his wedding.

Relaxing in our rocking chairs, feet up, in the shade of the pergola of the New Pretoria where we were staying, drinking endless bottles of whisky, quietly, regaining our strength, putting on weight, we watched the little town go past between our boots. *Peones* and lively *vaqueros* passed among the leaves of the vanilla plants, heavily-built cowboys from Holland, women bundled into dresses with leg-of-mutton sleeves, housewives, blond children with lint-pale

hair and skin gently tanned by the sun. There was a great deal of dust in the streets, and clouds of flies descended on us (in the evening it was mosquitoes, swarming around the torchlight). As he was switching at these flies with a horse-tail plume Lathuille spoke to us of Dorothée.

'I met her when I came back from New Zealand. I'd just made a cruise on a whaler, the *Gueld*, under Captain Owen, and we tied up in New Orleans, the twin-crescent city, our home port. Well, we laid up there. I'd hardly set duffle-bag to ground when I was hitting the bars and taverns of the Arcades and my pieces-of-eight were flying fast. Pretty soon I was flying too. There was a heavy sea in the hall. The floor of the saloon was pitching like the deck of the *Gueld* in polar ice, and the big table in the middle, covered with food and salads, began sneaking and sliding towards me like an iceberg. I didn't make a move. I'd just ordered a plate of green turtle with cloves, to purge the humours and heeb-y-jeebies I'd caught in the spindrift and drizzle of the Macquarie Islands. I was stiff all over, my rheumatism ached and my joints creaked like ship's pulleys. It was time to go in drydock and pad out my old frame a bit. The whaling had been good, I'd just got my pay, my share as leading-seaman and my harpooner's bonus, everything looked rosy, the bottles piled up before my eyes like a rainbow full of promises and I was happy where I was. It was hot, and I had my duffle-bag between my legs like a good watchdog. I might say it was raining outside as it can only rain in New Orleans. So I'd dropped anchor in the Red Donkey, I was well moored there and damned if I was going to cut loose for anybody.'

'That was just a year ago come St John's day.'

'A group of sailors were shooting with the electric rifle, somebody had slipped a nickel in the music box and a whole lot of tiny coloured lights came on and small stuffed birds flapped their wings and started to sing, striking up their little symphony, when Dorothée appeared right before my eyes. She was standing on the other side of the table. I

could see her hands as if it were daylight, she had rings on every finger with stones in them shining like drops of vodka, and away up above them somewhere was her face like a kind of mist-shrouded moon. She was bringing me the dish I'd ordered. It gave off a steam of dark, strongly spiced curaçao. God, it was good! That very minute I wanted to marry her.

'You know how it is with us rolling stones, we know a little about life in all parts but we always want to settle down in some small quiet spot beneath the orange trees and live in a white house where you have a view of the sea with a clean, good-looking bint who shines the furniture and hoists her heels for you in bed ten times a day and dreams up fancy grub, you know what I mean, those tasty little dishes that simmer for hours on a low fire—and you'd go in your shirtsleeves out to the garden and pick a few sage-leaves, that sort of thing, or you see yourself splitting kindling in the yard, or, pipe in mouth, going to market, for it's the man who should choose the good things, or maybe you're letting her have one in the chops for not keeping the house ship-shape. I knew it was only a dream and as soon as I was settled I'd get the itch again and I'd no sooner sit down than I'd want to pull on my old boots that's done the world with me and eat filthy chow from the galley and wear shirts with no collar-buttons and work like a slave and die of thirst in the sun and stick out my tongue and curse my dog's life and go to sleep in strange cities and lie dying of misery and want of money and meet an old burn like myself who's at the end of his rope and can't go on but somehow keeps kicking, no matter what, and stinks like a billy-goat. Never mind, this time I was bitten, but for good. The girl was beautiful. I'd just had a tasty bellyful. One drink followed the other. My pockets were full. The little mechanical birds were still singing. The bar was red-hot and anyway I'd strained my beams a little too much aboard that confounded, everlasting old whaler.

'Dorothée was the daughter of the house. The Red

Donkey belonged to her father, old Opphoff, a one-eyed, evil-tempered old Fleming. As she'd had two or three kids already her father was always tanning her backside, and maybe this explained her firm, elastic buttocks which I never tired of palping during the next three weeks. When the old man hammered her I'd say to myself. "Go to it, pretty soon it'll be my turn." And I'd laugh to myself, for I was sure she'd turn up in my bed that night whatever happened. By God, I'll never know how she managed to do it right under the old man's nose, I guess she knew her way around and I wasn't the first. I didn't give a damn about that, I'd got the bitch under my skin, I wanted to marry her, and oh, how she could cook! The more she said *no*, the more determined I was, for I come from Brittany and have nothing against keeping a pub.

'Now, listen carefully, for this is where the two of you come in.'

There was a south wind that day. It burned, it dried you out. The sky was full of ruffled clouds. A fine, yellow dust drifted everywhere, it stung your eyes and killed the flies and mosquitoes. The heat was suffocating. Our bodies itched all over. A tiny white rash erupted under our skins, our rocking-chairs whirred like sewing machines. Heat lightning flashed and the eucalyptus leaves grew pale.

Lathuille, who had got up to fill our glasses and had fished himself a magnificent purple pepper out of a pickle jar, went on with his story, his mouth full:

'Yes, this is where the two of you come in. One night Dorothée says to me, "Listen, Noël my sweet, it's not that I don't want you, not that at all, on the contrary, but you know there's nothing doing with my old man. And anyway in six months you won't have a cent, so it's no use insisting now, the old man's dead against it and I've taken a lot on your account—look here. I'm black and blue. But that's nothing, I like you so let's be sensible. You've seen a lot and know your way about. Go take a tour around the States, there's big money to be made just now, you can earn thou-

sands and thousands. Don't you read the papers? Don't you know what's going on in Russia, that there's grand dukes on the run with stolen crown jewels and a price on their heads? It seems they've holed up here and the country's full of them. All the detectives are on the look-out. There's thousands to be earned and you're smart enough to pull it off and bring a few customers to my father. Go and talk to him, he has some good leads. What, you don't get it? I thought you were sharper than that! You surprise me! Didn't you notice that my father's mixed up in a lot of funny business and that he's working for the cops? Now, go to it, my boy, we'll get married when you come back." Well, that's how it all started, and that's how I came to dig you up, gentlemen. Oh, that Dorothée, there's no flies on her.'

At this declaration, as sensational as it was unexpected, I was dumbfounded; and Moravagine burst out laughing. He laughed and laughed and doubled up until his rocking chair almost tipped over backwards. Lathuille, what a character! . . . That was a good one . . . Oh, no! . . . The old devil! . . . How did he manage to dream up such beauties! . . . What an old son-of-a-gun! . . . And that's what he'd had up his sleeve when he took us to his gold mine! . . .

'You wanted to keep us for yourself, that's why you took us into the desert! You wanted the Indians to capture us so you'd have the reward for yourself, right? Tell me, my good fellow, are you out of your mind? Did you have a good look at us? Do we look like grand dukes? Do we? And what's all this about Russia? Did the sirocco leave you touched in the head? Talk about a hare-brained scheme! You're a fine one, you are! . . .'

'Monsieur, Monsieur, Monsieur Moravagine, and you, Monsieur the English,' said Lathuille in confusion, 'I beg you, listen to me, I admit I went off the rails, I see now that I've stuck my finger in my own eye. It's all the fault of these newspaper clippings, here, look, I have about a

hundred of them, they're all the clues old Opphoff gave me, and I've got descriptions and photos as well, but none of you two. But when you're in love you're like a dog that's drunk hot milk, you've no sense of smell. Believe me, since that business with the Indians I'm all for you, that I can swear! You're going to come with me to New Orleans, I invite you to my wedding, you can stand up with me and you'll be able to convince the old man it's all right; what's more, I'm counting on you to set me up in life, I know you're not stingy, Monsieur Moravagine, and though we didn't name a price I've always served you well and took you on a fine trip when all's said and done. Just think how Dorothée will be impressed to see me turn up with a prince, two princes for pals, real friends of mine . . . ?

That same night we took the train.

The Red Donkey turned out in fact to be quite a good spot. It was comfortable enough and the food was tremendous. Old Opphoff was much more friendly than we had expected. And Dorothée was truly a very beautiful girl, Lathuille was right, she had what it takes (I recognized her a few years later in American comedy films: without being a star she was always in all the close-ups and knew how to make the most of herself). Moravagine had a little affair with her.

Lathuille had disappeared.

I never left the bar. I didn't trust a soul. Since Moravagine had insisted on walking into the lion's den, I kept an eye on the customers. There were always two or three types down there, one of them called Bob, almost as hard-working a drinker as I was, and a big brute of a half-breed called Ralph who often came to join him. I couldn't see anything suspicious. As soon as Ralph came in he would go and sit down at Bob's table. Then he would call for two big glasses and start preparing a most revolting mixture: ginger beer, gin, and port, a pint of each. Then he ordered two hot sausages, long ones, and absorbed another of his cocktails. Finally, with a robot-like gesture, he took off his

cap, laid his elbows on the table and his head on his hands and fell fast asleep. As for Bob, he sat sideways in his chair with his mouth-scorcher between his teeth smoking in short puffs, his skull against the wall, staring straight ahead of him, his eyes dilated, with an air of deep concentration.

I never saw them exchange a single word. It was always Bob who paid.

One night I had just gone up to my room, a great yellow room with two little iron beds and a cracked chamber pot. I was getting undressed when someone rammed the door in with his shoulder and Lathuille leapt at me.

'It's on, it's on!' he shouted, 'we're getting married tomorrow, the old man's given his consent.'

And he did a jig around the room.

The next day we bought two dinner jackets, Moravagine and I, and acted as witnesses for Lathuille's wedding. I later found out that Moravagine had given him ten thousand dollars.

That night there was a great party at the Red Donkey. Everybody was there, Ralph, Bob and other regulars. The bar was decorated with strings of electric lights, they'd set up a gramophone outside the door and we danced on the wharf. There was a big crowd: neighbours, passers-by, Negroes and Negresses formed a circle around us. Lathuille was three-quarters drunk. As for Moravagine, he was like a wild man, he whirled around with Dorothée in his arms as if she had been Olympio the ape. For my part, I stayed a little aside from it all, never having learned to dance. I was half-asleep where I sat.

All at once there was a violent scramble. I rose, upsetting my table. Ralph and Bob had rushed Moravagine and were holding him, one by each arm.

Two shots rang out.

It was Lathuille who had fired. A revolver in each hand, he roared at us, 'Mora, Mora, and you, the English, run for it, get the hell out. Run straight ahead of you. A

hundred yards down, past the gas reservoir, jump in the boat, I'll join . . .'

I ducked around old Opphoff who was coming at me with his arms stretched out. Moravagine had disappeared already. I started off after him for all I was worth. We leapt into a motor-boat. A second later Lathuille was with us and pushed off. We saw shadows running along the shore. Curses and shots rattled into the night. Then a woman's voice, a long cry, like a dog howling.

Away from the lighted wharf the night grew suddenly dark. We drifted with the current. Lathuille started up the motor. 'The bitch,' he growled, 'I bled her a little as I went by.'

The motor was purring. There was a final volley of revolver shots. We were already far out of range. Lathuille accelerated. The town was nothing but a halo.

Moravagine and I were still breathless from running, trembling with excitement, when Lathuille, going into a wide turn, pulled up alongside a steamer heading down the estuary. From the deck they threw us a rope, then a bit of a rope ladder. The water was already growing choppy. 'Up you go,' said Lathuille.

We were in our dinner-jackets, bare-headed, and this was how we appeared on board.

By daybreak we had passed the bore and left the murky waters of the Mississippi behind to breast the great swell of the ocean. We were on a fruit-ship bound for Trinidad.

Everything had happened so swiftly that we still didn't understand what it had all been about.

There we were, chattering with cold in the freshening breeze. No one paid any attention to us. Lathuille had made himself scarce. A lifebuoy revealed to us that we were on board the *General Hannah*. The freighter was tossing badly.

At last we saw the captain coming down the ladder from the bridge. Lathuille, grinning, was making faces behind

his back.

'Hullo, boys, I'm real glad to have you aboard. Did you have a good night?' said the captain.

He was a thundering mountain of a man, an ex-baseball champion. His name was Sunburry.

We got to the bottom of the affair when we were finally cosy in the ward-room and sipping an 1830 brandy. There were three cases of it in the cabin, along with a stock of the finest English tinned goods. Lathuille had arranged things nicely. He explained everything to us :

'Well, what do you say now? And you didn't want to believe me in San Antonio! Did I work things right, or didn't I? Have I got an eye and a nose? Without me you'd have been dead ducks. They saw you coming. I could have talked myself blue in the face telling them you weren't Russians, they wouldn't hear a word of it. For more than a year Ralph, Bob, Dorothée, old Opphoff and all the others were cooking up the deal and waiting for me to show up. There were more than ten of them, some of them bastards I didn't even know, never seen in my life, and they were all after my money. And so I laid my plans. One, two, three and the cat was in the bag. What a brawl! First of all I showed them the ten thousand you'd given me and the marriage was settled on at once. But I wanted nothing more to do with her, that Dorothée, nor with her brats nor her Ralph nor her Bob nor the whole gang at the Red Donkey. They know me down there, I don't go for two-faced ways and I don't like to be made the patsy. Now, you two, you're my pals, we're in it for life or death, am I right? Well, I gave five thousand to the old man to get them all on the hook. Then, on pretext of going to get permission to marry from the priest at Mobile where my mother lives, I got on my stilts and away, and that's when you didn't see me a while long. You must have wondered, eh? You must have been bored without me, were you, Monsieur Moravagine? And you, Monsieur the English, you were on pins and needles, weren't you? No, no joking now, I'll bet a case of

brandy you didn't dream I was working for you, and that I was quietly getting this cognac and a pile of gear and a whole bunch of stuff aboard this ship. What a guy, eh, this son-of-a-bitch Sunburry, he was ready to take you aboard and delay sailing for twenty-four hours. He's going to let us off at Paria, at the mouth of the Orinoco in Venezuela. But I had to fill up his cellar, 1830 brandy, nothing else would do, no Marie Brizard, no Three-Stars, no this, no that, and lots of other good advice, and as you hadn't been tight-fisted I got big ideas myself. To make a long story short, he cost me a lot, our big brother here, five thousand to be exact. And the end of that is that I haven't a bean, not *that* much, not a penny, except your guns, which I'd like you to have, and a word to the wise, next time you dress for dinner don't forget to stick your revolver in your pocket. If I hadn't thought of them you'd have been finished. Oh, I tell you, I went to a little trouble . . . ?

The ship was rolling heavily. The freighter was heading straight south across the Gulf of Mexico. Loaded as it was, it seemed to me that it listed more and more. The engines chugged irregularly. Great clouds of eddying smoke puffed out showing their dirty underthings whipped up by the wind and shedding showers of cinders and soot. It was raining. The ship seemed deserted. We saw only a few members of the crew, always the same ones, mulattoes, doing nothing. Sunburry, Lathuille and Moravagine kept up an eternal succession of domino games. I was bad-tempered and depressed. What was to become of us? Lathuille had shown himself more dangerous than I would have thought. For the first time I was worried about the future. But what was the use? What did I care? Did I even belong to myself any more? Ha ha ha! And what should I do? Where should I go? God, how disgusted I was with myself! God, how bored I was! I had felt an inexpressible loathing for everything. I was incapable of enthusiasm, incapable of indifference, unlike Moravagine. Men and things, adventures and countries all bored me to tears, wearied me to death.

The only thing that remained unchanged was my great weariness and my sadness, no I didn't give a damn for my sadness, there was nothing but my weariness and my profound detestation of everything. Not even suicide was worth while. And living? Ah, no, I'd had a taste of that! What then? Nothing. And to make myself believe that I still cared two cents about what happened to us I went to have a look at the marine maps lying on the captain's bunk.

Let's see now, what was it Lathuille said? Paria? At the mouth of the Orinoco? Venezuela? Well. Here the colours shaded off, here were the sand-banks, there the coast of Venezuela, the mouth of the Orinoco, but where was Paria? I saw islands, hundreds, thousands of islands, I saw the whole river-delta, dozens, hundreds of branches and mouths, but never a settled place, never a village, never a name, not even a lighthouse, not even a beacon. Not bad, not bad at all. We're going nowhere. Paria doesn't even exist. It all fits in.

'Tell me, Captain, where are you taking us?'

'I don't know.'

'What do you mean, you don't know?'

'Just that. I don't know.'

'And what about Paria?'

'Never heard of it.'

'You don't know Paria?'

'No. Ask Lathuille.'

Sunburry hasn't stopped playing. He's keeping score on a slate.

I turn to Lathuille who's mixing dominoes: 'Look here, Lathuille, where is Paria if it's not on the map?'

'How should I know!'

'What! You don't know either?'

'No.'

'Well?'

'Well what?'

Lathuille stares at me. Then he chooses his dominoes and, arranging them in order, he says, 'You'll see what I

mean. There are floating islands that go down the Orinoco. Some of them get hung up on the sand-banks. Others sail far out to sea. These the natives call "parias". The first one we meet, we land there. I don't know where it is. When we're there, we're in Paria.'

'But tell me,' say I, astounded. 'How on earth . . . ?'

'Double-six!' shouts Moravagine, holding the domino in his hand and opening the game.

They're starting another one.

Some ten sea-miles before we reach terra firma we're already sailing through a kind of slime. Heavy vapours hover above the water and you can't see three yards ahead of you. It's impossible to say where the fresh water starts and the salt water ends, or where to place the line between sea and land. After a time of storms, when the wind from the open sea has scattered the curtain of fog and the ground-swell has rushed the surface morass, tearing away the sand- and mud-banks, one can make headway without fear of missing the passage or getting lost or running aground or simply sinking. It was otherwise with us. We arrived there in fine weather, the clouds-in-the-making were more dense than ever, there were sand-banks everywhere and we were sailing blindly among floating islands and clumps of uprooted trees. It's two days since we left the *General HannaH* to the sound of the giant Sunburry roaring after us in the scorching heat: 'Good luck, boys. I'm real glad to see you safely in port. Hope you've had a good crossing.'

We were drifting along in a sort of collapsible ship's boat of rubberized canvas, all three of us heaped into it, Lathuille, Moravagine and myself, along with cases of tinned food and firearms. We had nothing to drink. Sunburry had refused to surrender a single bottle. The heat was atrocious. We took exhausting turns at the short oars and stirred, as if with two spoons, the pewter-coloured, heavy, stinking water, full of carrion and rubbish. The hoarse exhalations of sea-cows sputtered on every side of us.

We had already spotted land once, briefly, through a rift

in the fleeing mists; the evening of the third day, the ceiling having risen, we thought we could perceive a breakwater in the distance. At dawn, it turned out that what we had taken for a breakwater was a line of tall coconut palms. Several times we tried to go ashore, but in vain. As far as the eye could see the shore consisted of one endless, chaotic rampart of uprooted forests, roots, tangled brushwood, holes, muddy craters, yawning wounds, debris, great slabs of black vegetable mould sliding towards the water. When by chance you succeeded in setting foot on this spongy soil without immediately going up to your hips in it, and when you had managed to surmount this first line of defence, you saw behind it nothing but lakes, little lakes, big lakes, lagoons large and small, putrescent ponds and cracking bogs. An insane growth of vegetation, scrubby, half-submerged, shining and inextricable, swarmed over this whole area. At the very horizon a dark line marked the virgin forest, the rain forest. That was terra firma.

We struck off through a multitude of channels, following many meanders and making our way through a positive maze of sinuous turns, troughs, bottlenecks and ditches, to emerge, suddenly, under the archway of the high jungle.

It was majestic and unexpected. We were in the middle of the great river. Here reigned a twilight only faintly lit by the flowering creepers hanging from the topmost branches. Not a sound of wings, not a murmur. The banks were a brilliant ochre. The black water of the deep coves was mounted in settings of white sand, little crescent-shaped beaches. The alligators looked up when we began to unship the oars.

We rowed up the Orinoco without speaking.

That went on for weeks, for months.

The air was like a steam-bath.

We seldom set foot on land, and almost never in places that were inhabited.

In the lower Orinoco there are many plantations—coffee, cocoa, sugar-cane, but above all, banana plantations. They

stretch for weeks along the irregular banks of the river. The banana-trees are planted in quincunxes and stand camped at night like babylonian armies. Every man that moves in this climate takes with him a solid column of mosquitoes whose vanguard is fixed to his shoulders. The wretches busying themselves among all the foliage are half-breeds, of Spanish fathers and native women. They slash down the bunches with machetes or sabres. When they gestured to us to come nearer it was to offer us sugar-cane *guarapo* or give us a supply of *chica*, that distillation of the root of sweet cassava.

Much farther inland, Angosturna is the last stop of the *Simon Bolívar*, the only steamer to trade up and down this river. It's a floating monster three decks high, painted white with red and blue stripes. No keel, only grooves; the bottom is flat as that of a barge. At the stern the single wheel, an enormous thing, is as high and wide as the hull. The bottom deck is taken up by the engines, whose immense boilers are fed with wood—precious woods, cabinet makers' lumber, mahogany and rosewood. The lumbermen, mostly Quechua Indians, supply us with tablas, little balls of chocolate coarsely mixed with raw sugar, and with *assai*, a kind of half-solid, half-liquid liqueur that is extracted from the fruit of some palm-tree and drunk from a *couī* or halved calabash.

Still farther up the river we plunge again into the tall virgin forest, and farther again, after passing the rapids, we enter the region of the *llanos* where every kind of vegetation flourishes.

We went up the Orinoco without speaking.

It went on for weeks, for months.

The air was like a steam-bath.

There were always two of us rowing, the third busied himself with fishing and hunting. With the help of branches and palm-leaves we had transformed our boat into a tropical hut, so that we always had shade. In spite of this we were peeling, our skin fell off everywhere and our faces

were so shrivelled that we all looked as if we were wearing masks. And this new mask, glued shrinking to our faces, compressed our skulls, bruised and deformed our brains. Our thoughts, crushed and constrained, atrophied.

Mysterious life of the eye.

Enlargement.

Billions of ephemera, of infusoria, of bacilli, algae and yeasts, glances, fermentations of the brain.

Silence.

Everything took on a monstrous character in this aquatic solitude, these sylvan depths: the boat, our utensils, our gestures, our food, this currentless river which grew ever wider, though we were moving towards its source; the bearded trees, rubbery underbrush, secret thickets, centuries-old growth, the creepers, all the nameless grasses, the luxuriant flow of sap; this sun imprisoned like a pupa, weaving, weaving at its cocoon, this torrid haze that we towed with us, these clouds in formation, these soft vapours, this gently undulating highway, an ocean of leaves, of cotton, of oakum, of lichens, of mosses; these swarms of stars, this velvet sky, this moon that was liquid like syrup, our muffled oars, the splashing, the silence.

We were surrounded by tree-ferns, hairy plants, pulpy odours, glaucous humus.

A flowing. Becoming. Compenetration. Tumescence. The swelling of a bud, the unfolding of a leaf, glutinous bark, juicy fruit, sucking root, distillation of a seed. Germination. Creeping fungus. Phosphorescence. Decay. Life.

Life, life, life, life, life, life.

Strange presence at whose strictly timed command the most grandiose spectacles of nature burst out upon the stage.

And our poor human impotence—how could we not be horrified anew each day by it!

Every morning we awoke with an uneasy shiver. The sky slid back on its curtain-rod, the patchwork foliage trembled like a motley quilt and suddenly the birds and monkeys

were switched on, just a quarter of an hour before dawn. Fluttering frolics, screams, improvised songs, throaty cackles of sabas and parakeets—we emerged from our sleep grumbling at the racket. We knew in advance what the day held for us. Behind us we left the steaming river ripped and torn, before our prow it opened with a yawn, half-solid with filth. In the wind there was a fluttering of sheets and drapes. One moment you saw the sun naked, stark naked, studded with gooseflesh, then an immense eiderdown settled over us, an eiderdown of humidity that stopped our eyes, our ears, our lungs. The cackling, singing voices, the whistles and calls were absorbed as if by a gigantic blotter. Gyrating colours drifted past our craft, leaving stains. Through the mists and vapours all creatures and things appeared to us like opaque tattoos, blurred and faded. The sun was leprous. We were roofed-in, with twenty feet of air around us and a ceiling of fifteen, a cotton-wool ceiling, thick and quilted. Not even a shout could escape. Drops of sweat ran down our bodies, dripped off, fell on our bellies : great, warm, slow drops as big as eggs, warm as eggs about to hatch, slow as a fever on the point of flowering. We stuffed ourselves full of quinine. We were nauseated. Our oars grew pulpy in the heat. Our clothing grew heavy with mould. It rained continually, and when it rained it rained warm water and our teeth loosened in our gums. What a dream, what an opium dream ! Everything that loomed up within our small horizon was coralline, that is to say varnished, shining, hard, with a terrifying relief of detail, and as in a dream the detail was always aggressive and menacing, filled with a suppressed hostility, at the same time logical and unbelievable. Like fevered patients tossing in bed we would zigzag towards one of the shores to catch a breath of air. What a nightmare ! Nine times out of ten when we did this the underbrush opened to make way for a party of hostile Indians. They were powerfully built, tall, with loose-flying hair, their nostrils pierced by sharp sticks, their ear-lobes elongated by the weight of heavy discs of

vegetable ivory, their lower lips decorated with tusks and claws or bristling with thorns. They were armed with bows and blow-tubes which they fired in our direction. As they were reputed to be cannibals we would quickly paddle back to mid-stream and resume our dream of the damned. Great blue butterflies, called pamploneras, came to light on our hands and stir the air with their damp, distended wings.

We lived under a curse. Night brought us no rest. In the bluish evening mist that followed the rain, millions of feathery, plumed plants would drip persistently, incessantly. Giant bats swooped and soared. Cascabeles dipped and waved near the water. The musky stink of crocodiles made us gag and retch. We could hear turtles laying eggs, endless eggs, tirelessly. Beached at the tip of a promontory, we wouldn't dare light a fire. We camouflaged ourselves, we crouched in a heap among the rubbery roots that gripped the banks like the weird, clutching foot of some monstrous tarantula. We slept an uneasy sleep. Lycanthropy. Whichever of us was mounting guard resisted as best he could the spell of the mosquitoes' whine by imitating the drawn-out miaowing of the jaguars. In the sky the moon was swollen like a hypodermic wound. The stars were red, like marks left by sharp teeth.

It was still raining.

The flood was spreading.

The river began to take on the aspect of a lake, of an inland sea. We were near the region of its source. What we saw was an immense plain completely submerged. Whole forests were under water. Tufted islands drifted with the current. Fields of wild rice fed millions of birds. Ducks, geese, swans of extraordinary size squawked and pecked and quarrelled. We let ourselves drift with the deadwood trunks. Our little boat was leaking on all sides, it was worn to the fabric; and each time a storm broke (they are frequent and incredibly violent in these parts) we were terrified of foundering.

Lathuille was lying in the boat's bottom. He was dying. His body was covered with abscesses and great worms appeared through holes in his skin. Stretched out in the tepid water collected there, he gave us advice as to what we must do to cross with impunity the torrid lands which, he said, lay beyond this immensity of water. We would be ashore any day now. We listened without lending too much credence to the fruits of his long experience, for he had grown a little mad.

'Ship your oars,' he said. 'Believe me, I know from other times. Let yourselves drift. There's a triple current that divides these stagnant waters. It's a geographical mystery : Lundt, the explorer, told me once how it works. I think he was right. We must be in the basin that serves as source for twenty different rivers, and the Amazon and the Orinoco are two of them. I'd have liked to test it out. But I'm still proud to have brought you this far. Say what you like, our rubber boat was a good one; for once big Jeff didn't cheat me. When you reach land you can abandon it. Meanwhile, follow the driftwood and when you see an old tree-trunk covered with little flags, follow it, it's heading the right way. It's a *turuma* that goes down the Amazon every year as far as Manaos, goes up the Rio Negro and ends up sleeping here until the next Easter. As it stops in all the river-ports and tributary mouths the natives dress it devoutly with little pennants. Now is the time of year when it starts downstream again, you're sure to run across it. I know you're unbelievers, both of you, but listen to me, I beg you, follow that log but never touch it or the "Mae d'Agua" will drag you to the bottom. If you meet the'

It was a sunny morning. For a change the sky was clear. Lathuille was in his death agony. He was lying on the spongy turf. We had beached on an island. Moravagine was off laying snares. I was leaning over the sick man making him drink a potion of boiled herbs, when an arrow came and planted itself trembling in his throat. I screamed. I started for the boat where we had left our firearms but it

had disappeared. I ran back to Lathuille. The arrow was still trembling. Two pink feathers quivered near its notched end. At this point Moravagine returned. He had bagged a couple of landrails. I hadn't even had time to tell him what had happened when we were surrounded by some twenty Indians. They advanced towards us, silently tightening the circle. Moravagine started to make a speech to them but a blow from a paddle laid him out and in a moment he was tightly bound with thongs. We were confronted by Blue Indians.

Sick, weary and disarmed, we now were prisoners.

I had let myself slump down on the medicine box, passively awaiting my fate, when a long, lanky figure addressed me. He remained a few paces away. He did a little dance, marking time where he was, slapping his thighs and uttering cadenced phrases in my direction in a harsh, guttural tongue. He never took his eyes off me. I didn't know what he was saying and got nothing out of his gestures. I had stood up. Twenty pairs of eyes were staring at me. I was in a quandary. I didn't know what to say or do. Moravagine was gnawing at his thongs. There was blood on his face.

'Go ahead, tell him anything!' he bellowed.

Lathuille's body was lying between us.

I tore out the arrow that had just nailed our unfortunate companion and held it out to the chief. A dark pool began to spread on the ground. Already fat flies were at it. I was in the grip of fever. I was shivering.

The chief had grasped the arrow. Now he was performing a new dance, grotesquely, on his heels, knees apart. He backed in a circle around the dead man. A necklace of red feathers hung down his back. His withered buttocks trembled in the sunlight. He made sudden waddling movements and occasional bumps and grinds. He held the arrow at his line of sight and the vertical shadow of the arrow darkened one eye. From time to time he would whirl and all his troop would utter a long cry. Finally a processional circle formed.

The Indians went round and round Moravagine hopping on one foot.

'Mora, don't be an arsehole!' I shouted. Moravagine was loading them with insults.

The chief was squatting on his heels. He was juggling three little stones. He had stuck the arrow in his long hair.

After all this fuss and nonsense the Indians carried us off. Their flotilla was in the tall reeds. They threw Moravagine into a pirogue. A tall old man bore Lathuille's body. As for me, I was made to get into the chief's canoe. Two Indians followed me with the medicine box. I was shown great courtesy. I realized later that from the beginning the Indians had taken me for a sorcerer, partly because of the box and also because I was in a trance. The largest of the log canoes towed our poor rubber boat which was drowning at the end of a cord and struggling in the wake like a tied beast trying to free itself. And there were our lovely guns, shining in the stern of this frantic cockle-shell and falling one by one into the water. Before sundown we had reached the big Indian village, the great village perched in the trees. A hundred thousand voices greeted us there.

The Blue Indians give off a strange odour, for they are all sick, of an illness called *caratay*. It is a skin disease of syphilitic origin. It is invariably hereditary and highly contagious. It consists of a discoloration of the natural pigment, a sort of subcutaneous piebald effect that marbles the body with 'geographical' splotches, generally bluish on a pale background. The disease comes in varied shades, however, and several kinds of *caratay* are known. Its treatment would be simple with the help of mercury compounds. The Indians think nothing of it, they merely scratch.

The Blue Indians who had made us their prisoners belonged to the ancient tribe of the Jivaros. Before the Conquest the Jivaros were all-powerful. Inclined to war, they were continually skirmishing with their neighbours, the Sutagaos and the Tunjas; since the Conquest their numbers have diminished considerably. The Spaniards, however,

never quite conquered them, and the annals of their history have been preserved to this day by the people of Bogota, who recall the great *Cacique* or *Cipa*, Saguanmachica, who almost captured their city, and the *Usaque*, Usatama, who is mentioned by the ancient chronicler Mota Padilla in his *Conquista del Reino de la Nueva Granada*, cap. 25, numeros 3 y 4. ms. (I came upon this information ten years later in the archives of Seville while preparing an attempt on the life of the King of Spain.)

The Jivaros of today, called Blue Indians by reason of their nasty disease, are tall and well-built. Their limbs differ from those of Indians from the north and east in the elongation of their bones and the delicacy of their joints. The head, well-set above the shoulders, is subquadangular in form, and the facial angle resembles that of the Caucasian race. The neck is delicate and long. Their hair, black, thick and straight, covers part of the forehead and is thrown back in equal parts over each shoulder. Their eyes, slanted upwards from the lachrymal caruncle to the outer corner, are small and piercing. Their mouths are large, with rather thick lips. They file the crowns of their teeth straight across. Their bodies are muscular, especially their legs and arms, and the posterior concavity of the lumbar region is highly developed in their women. Their hands and feet are of average size, usually short and nervous. The volume of the thorax is not highly developed in the females, whose breasts are ovoid with flat nipples.

The men dress in a skimpy loin-cloth called a *guyaco*, the women in a somewhat longer one called a *furquina*. Their headdress is made from the feathers of guacamayos and parakeets. Most of the time they go bare-headed. They all have their necks ornamented with necklaces of animals' teeth or coloured seeds. From their pierced ears hang fragments of wood or bamboo. This deployment of vanity is completed by pieces of vanilla or odoriferous roots. They tattoo their arms, legs and face with red stripes. The women paint only the surface of the lower lip and tattoo their fore-

arms, wrists and ankles. These tattoos are ineradicable, and are made with a resin called *urracai*.

These Indians spend their days at what is called *mariscar*, that is, fishing and hunting. Their palm-wood bow uses arrows made of a light reed called *arraxos*. The point is armed with a sharpened animal's tooth. The women are highly skilled in the art of making hammocks from feathers. They also twist very strong cords and weave wild cotton. They know how to tan the skins of the manatee and the *capahu*. Although these Indians have neither flutes nor blow-tubes, the urge to whistle which seems indigenous to all the natives of South America has found a curious expression in their case. They manufacture porous jugs with two compartments. These receptacles take on the forms of every branch of the local fauna, especially the birds. They fill the compartments with a certain amount of water. On the side of the vase is an opening that acts as a mouthpiece, and when one blows into it a sound emerges which is the cry of the particular animal or bird this ocarina-jug represents. These jugs are of all sizes, from whistle to urn, and their voices emerge with every kind of resonance and volume. Every Indian has his *gaguere* on which he blows the cry of his totem a hundred times a day. All these voices reunited form the loveliest of cacophonies. It was this type of concert that had greeted us on the evening of our arrival.

The Jivaros Indians practise another peculiar art which goes even farther than the scalp collecting so dear to the Redskin. They conserve the head or even the whole body of their enemies in their collective possession. After coming to live in these lacustrine forests they developed a strange way of reducing the size of their victims, whether whites or natives, so as not to clutter up their aerial villages. By substituting a framework of tree-roots for the skull or skeleton, they reduce an adult's head to the size of an orange and transform a good-sized man into a doll. Their plastic art is so exact that the mummified faces keep their

natural expression and even the whole body has, in its shrunken state and despite the disproportion of the hands and feet, something of its former posture. I was present during the terrifying operation when they shrank in this way the remains of poor old Lathuille. Confounded chatter-box that he was, he's now in the Trocadero museum, the finest sample in the whole collection of *tsantsas*.

Their religion is nagualism, a kind of individual totemism. Following a revelation in a dream or a state of ecstasy, a man feels himself to be in a state of intimate communion with some particular creature or thing. They call up spirits and practise necromancy. Each one has his own spirit: that of the swamp, the snow-leopard, the eagle, the snake, the moon, the water, the pelican, or some fish or crustacean. The totem is called the *paccarisca*, that is to say 'the origin', the 'thing that engenders', the 'Being of the jungle'. The creature or thing revered enjoys privileges: it may not be killed or eaten or cut or broken or reduced to ashes or evaporated. During their feasts each one is obliged to display his insignia; at these times the man puts on an animal's skin or some finery of leaves or feathers, or wets his head, or juggles pebbles; he imitates by his dance a certain way of walking or flying or swimming: he runs, jumps, creeps, glides or undulates and blows into the jug that is supposed to emit the true voice of his totem.

The most important religious feast is the one which is celebrated during the fourth lunar month and which is not without its analogies with the sacred and profane practices peculiar to the feasts of expiation in Christian countries. This is the feast of the 'Young Penitent', a youth who is destined to immolation—one might say the Christ of the Jivaros. They pick out the handsomest of their captives. From this moment on he is charged with the great act of redemption. He is dressed up in splendid clothing. Incense is burned where he is to pass by, he is honoured by the shed blood of animals and by gifts of flowers, fruits and grain. In the old days the newly-born were sacrificed to him. He him-

self goes about quite freely and visits all the villages. Everywhere the crowd prostrates itself in adoration of him, for he is the living image, the human image of the Sun. Not only does he lead this festive life for a full month, but every cabin is open to him, the choicest dishes are prepared for him, he eats the finest cuts of venison and is regaled with wild honey and fermented palm-wine and on top of all this he is publicly married to four young virgins of the rarest beauty, specially chosen for him. The wives of the chiefs are ardent to receive his favours, and mothers among the common folk give him the first fruits of their daughters. All those that he fecundates are at once counted as saints, become taboo and go cloister themselves in the *acclas* or village convents where they no longer have any contact with their families. It is from among their offspring that the successor of a dead chief will later be chosen. On the fatal day the priests make off with this deified man and tear out his heart, while the people chant : 'Hey-lay-lah, what a day ! Today we have no more need of Thee as our King nor of the Sun as our God. We already have a God that we adore and a chief for whom we are prepared to die. Our God is the Ocean of Water that surrounds us, and anyone can see that it is greater than the Sun and that it feeds us in abundance. Our Chief is Thy Son. Thy Son, yea, our Older Brother. Hey-lay-lah, what a day !'

As the Jivaros had no other prisoner, the man-god who did the Little Jesus act for the Blue Indians that year, eating the fatted calf and tasting the high life of the tree-cabins, was none other than Moravagine. The Indians had rigged him out in a crown of feathers. His face was covered by a mask painted bright yellow. Little cords in carmine red were hung about his waist. His lower legs were bound with flowered ribbons each bearing three little ceramic bells. In his hand he held a calculiform stone on which a sign was graven. The sign consisted of a cylinder with two little circles at its base and another at the top. It was a symbol, 'the bamboo in the vase of water, the male in the vase of

the female.' This sign was read aloud as *ah-ha-oo*.

This was a time of perpetual comings and goings, climbing into canoes, climbing out of canoes. Each day an increasing number of Indians accompanied Moravagine-the-god on his excursions. They were making a tour of all the villages. Perched in the highest branches of the trees, the Indians made the forest resound with their musical jugs. The *gaguères* cooed night and day, they called to each other across the swamps and answered from the very heart of the rain-forest. They croaked and moaned and sometimes whistled so high, so shrill, that I fancied myself the prisoner of a race of crickets.

I was always alone. They left me quite free. Free for what? I went from one tree to the other over the tangle of creepers. As I was obliged to fend for myself I went fishing almost every day. I culled poisoned oysters from between the mangrove roots. I caught crabs, hideous crabs shaped like an ossified anus, I angled with anchored lines and often fished out of the water a kind of naked lamprey, viscous and stinking of slime. I did all these things so mechanically that I frequently forgot to watch my lines and went home empty-handed to my cabin. On such days I would not go out again. I would chew Nicot's leaves. No one ever came to see me. The children were too frightened. The women disliked me because I would have nothing to do with them. The men avoided me, though I had cured several of them. Only the head-shrinker would hang around occasionally. He envied my secrets and my skill. His name was U Pel Mehenil, which means 'His Only Son'. ('Whose son?') He stank.

The days went by. The days, the nights. It was all the same to me. Water lapped against the piling. I was putrid with lice and filth. My hair hung to my shoulders. My beard frothed against my neck. I never even wondered what my fate would be at the end of the lunation. When I saw Moravagine-the-god pass by I turned away from him. We hadn't exchanged a word since we arrived among the

Blue Indians. His apotheosis or his death were only faintly interesting to me. I hadn't given a thought to Europe or to how I might get back to civilization. What did all that mean to me? I'd forgotten everything. I fished, I chewed, I spat, I ate with my fingers. I crawled back to lie down in my hut—where I never slept, but where, on the other hand, I never experienced insomnia. I had no worries, no memories. Nothing, nothing, nothing. Nothing but fever. A slow fever. I was in a melting state, I had velvet beneath my skin.

Malaria.

I was sodden, idiotic, thoughtless, flabby. No thoughts, no past, no future. Even the present was non-existent. Everywhere water trickled down. The heaps of ordure piled ever higher. A frightful stench rose from the stagnant village where great pet snakes lay coiled at the cabin thresholds. All was ponderous, eternal. Heavy. The sun. The moon. My solitude. The night. The yellow expanse that was my view. The fog. The jungle. The water. The passage of time beeped out by a toad or a late *gaguere* : do-re, do-re, do-re, do-re, do-re, do-re

Absence. Indifference. Immensity. Zero. Zero. A cluster of stars. They call it the Southern Cross. Which south? To hell with the south. And the north. And the east and west and the works. And whatever else. And nothing. Shit.

. . . do-re, do-re, do-re, do-re, do-o-re, do-o-o-re, do-o-o-re

And I listen

One night as I lay on my cot someone called me by name. What name? Was I still alive? Someone had murmured my name, my first name, Raymond. Strange, I couldn't fathom it. Something very heavy had taken the place of my head. I couldn't move. My arms and legs were gigantic. I must be a part of the night, or of a tomb. Then came the rustling of cloth. I perked up my ears.

And I fell into my bottomless self, losing all foothold. The world was a stiffening of joints, a tourniquet. I re-

member a sort of skidding of the perpendicular, as if my point of balance had shifted slightly upwards and then to the left, leaving me helpless, collapsed.

I was floating in the void as if borne by a million Lilliputians.

Balloons of light went up in my brain, but I was still stifling, I was tossed and pulled and dropped.

I came to myself a little.

Consciousness. Floating cork, cork and bark, bark, wood. Wood. Bits of wood. Hard wood. Oars everywhere, like insects' legs, moving. I'm aware of floating. But I'm tired. My head nods. I feel a draught of air on my eyes. But where are my hands, my legs, my body? I'm like a rolled-up blanket, a skein of yarn, a distaff bound with hemp. Now a piercing, prickling sensation, a needle-puncture, a pinprick, a point of pain invading my consciousness, a voice needling me with a sharpened name : 'Raymond !'

I groan.

This time I've made it. It's I, I myself groaning. I'm here. I open my eyes. Wide, wide.

Moravagine is leaning over me like a threatening universe.

'What ! What is it ?'

'Drink, Raymond, old friend, drink.'

I drink greedily of something that does me good at once, and I go to sleep, experiencing a horrid sensation of teetering vertigo.

This scene takes place again and again.

When I open my eyes I see a sky that grows harder and harder, more and more blue, to the point where I can no longer stand the glare and must quickly close my sick eyes. Then, beneath my closed eyelids, Moravagine's face, which I had scarcely had time to see, grows slowly larger. At first it appears as if on a photographic plate, in negative, the skin black, the mouth and eyes in white. Its outlines are blurred. Then, as I concentrate painfully, I see two bits of ivory that pierce his left ear. A tattoo bars his face. Can

this be? He's giggling. I open my eyes. He's still leaning over me. Water is running swiftly past his armpits. An eighteen-man Blue Indian canoe forms a backcloth to his head. His face is an expressionless mask. The necklace of red feathers hanging at his throat dangles directly before me making me cross-eyed, making me cry out. This is horrible. I black out.

He's speaking.

'Remember Lathuille and all the claptrap he talked before he died? Well, he wasn't so crazy, it was all true. The business about the tree trunk with little flags and the rules of conduct we should follow if we met Indians—it all came back to me while I was playing the bloody fool and being the Good Lord to the savages. They worshipped me, you know.'

Everything's in a whirl.

I burst out laughing. He goes on: 'You know, you're a silly ass. You pretended to want nothing to do with me and you snubbed all the Indian women, young and old, who came to share your cabin. Don't you remember Lathuille saying, "If you come across Indian women, make love to them French style"? That's what I did. My four wives were exhausted. I had all the chiefs' wives eating out of my hand. I initiated the daughters of the common people. I did it to every one of them. I taught them a whole dictionary of fine points. They organized themselves and took turns among my four wives and myself. Some came from the farthest villages to take part in this new academic game, and every day my disreputable following was swelled by new recruits.'

I'm now aware of riding the waves. I go to sleep. Then, half awake, I no longer have the strength to think. Someone is forcing my teeth apart and pouring in a tasty liquid. I swallow. I feel swollen, soft, full of spittle and ganglions. I can now move one leg, and I find my hands again. I seem to weigh a ton. I should smile now, for I'm recovering. But I'm still too weak to do so, and above all I lack

the courage to open my eyes. I'm far away. I try to listen. I hear Moravagine's voice murmur my name and go on with the story: 'The women and young girls came with me or followed in the chiefs' pirogues; they brought me the *gaguères*, their clan totems, their village fetishes. I saw them coming, I laughed under my yellow mask. El Dorado! I made my ceramic bells ring, I showed them a new dance, a new ritual ceremony of which they themselves were the object. I preached Emancipation to them, I predicted the coming of a girl born of their embraces, Sappho the Redemptress, I suggested forming a great college of female chiefs. The *acclas* were deserted. The *mamma-cuntas* surrounded me with ferocious devotion. They were the most ardent prophetesses of the new sect.'

It can't be true. I'm here. I'm sleeping. I'm awake again. I find myself, lose myself again. I move my hands once more, gently, gently. Yes, no. Yes, no. No, someone is caressing my hands, gently, gently, once more. Oh, how fine it is! Then a great gurgling of running water. I'm lost again. Far away. But listening.

'When I'd assembled the biggest fleet of pirogues around me I had them burn the central village and we started the predicted Migration south, to the sun, by the Rio Negro. Before this each married woman had sacrificed her last-born to me, and every girl had sacrificed her blood brother. In the trees the men were howling like monkeys. It was three days before my sacrifice, the taboo was still in force. Powerless, terrified, the priests were unable to interfere. I had all the *gaguères* broken and sank all the pirogues we couldn't use. I had all the totems destroyed, all the sacred charms. What a hecatomb! I'd picked you up in passing, you and your medicine box. As you were in delirium I interpreted every one of your screams as an order. Every morning I emptied a bottle of your drugs into the river. In the evenings, camping on some deserted shore, I would have a great fire lit and give out copious libations of palm wine to the women, who had always been forbidden to

drink it, and we would celebrate a tremendous orgy ending in the sacrifice of one of them. I would open her belly for her.'

Shouting, singing, dancing; and it was I who had pointed out the victims, for in my ravings I'd made violent gestures enough.

No, I hadn't gesticulated; I had obeyed.

'First I slit open my four wives, Little Old Woman, Big Old Woman, Waterfall and Lack of Water. Then Corn Collar, of the Squirrel clan, and Pretty Bird, of the Tree clan. And so on, every night, a known girl or woman, a star, with the choice falling by preference on one of whom all the others were jealous, the last night's favourite.'

No, I hadn't gesticulated. Yes, we are saved. It's true, I was very, very sick. Where are we? We'll be there tomorrow? Fine. Yes, yes, I'll be strong enough to walk, never fear. No, I won't be scared, don't worry.

'We spent seventeen weeks going down the Rio Negro. Every Sunday I abandoned an empty pirogue for which there was no more crew. Seven six-paddle pirogues turned back and the women returned to their village. Many died of privations. In the last week there were no more than thirteen in the big canoe: Bread Soup from Etzal, Big Feast, Little Feast, Flower Banquet, Fall of the Fruits, Dust Broom, Arrival of the Gods, Mountain Path, Feast for the Eyes, Gleaning Time, Little Creeper and you and myself.'

Can this be yesterday, today or tomorrow?

'Get up!'

I get up. My head is full of darkness. There's a great sun and a hundred torches. Moravagine helps me every inch of the way. We're going up a ladder. There are men up there waving to me. My legs give way. I'm on board a steamship. I laugh, I laugh. We go down a stairway. Many hands are holding me upright. We're in a long corridor. Long, long, I'm sinking . . . Light bulbs are whirling. A floor springs up at me, draws me down. I trip on a copper wire. I fall. I fall. I let myself go. I'm in a bed. Now I

realize. Now I understand. 'Oh, how good Europe smells ! Oh, how good Europe smells !' The sheets, the lights. Lots and lots of white. Clean linen. A shirt. Everything's scrubbed. I fall asleep. Really asleep.

Now, when I wake, I open my eyes at once. The first thing I see is a row of carefully labelled bottles, then the scaly face of the doctor coming and going among the ceiling lights. Moravagine is always there, holding my hand. I'm given needles. I hear the ever-so-comforting sound of the ship's engines. Moravagine is still there, holding my hand. My hand. I fall asleep. I sleep. A real sleep.

Days, weeks go by. I have no way of knowing how many. I feel well. I come back to life. Life is good. I feel like new. Moravagine is always there. The moment I open one eye and smile at him he tells me stories that make me laugh.

Everything he tells me makes me laugh. It's an impulse, it's my way of coming back to life.

Laughter.

He's talking.

'Little Creeper, *Malinatlí*, was cross-eyed in both eyes, but she had enormous biceps. She was the best paddler . . . '

Or again : 'Dust Broom, *Ochpanitzli*, who was so sweet, leapt in the water when she saw the steamer. As I was just getting you out of the canoe I couldn't look after her. I heard her howling for a long time. An alligator had her by the leg. You know I'm no swimmer . . . '

Or again : 'It was *Etzacualitzli*, Bread Soup, who stroked your hands. She belonged to the Ant clan . . . '

I can't help it, I'm choked with laughter. Then the ship's doctor intervenes and begs Moravagine to stop talking so as not to tire me. The good doctor. We're aboard the *Marajo*, a little Brazilian steamer that sails direct from Manaos (Amazonas province) to Marseille (department of the Bouche du Rhône). We sail a thousand nautical miles down the Amazon, we float along on this most ancient river of the globe, through this valley that is like the matrix of

the world, this paradise of earthly life, nature's sanctuary. But what's nature to us? What do we care for the loveliest things that grow, for the rarest spectacles of creation? We don't stir from the ship's infirmary. We laugh. Shut in. Hand in hand. Moravagine and I.

(o) Back to Paris

We reached Paris as the city gates were closing on the Bonnot scandal.

I had taken Moravagine to the only hotel I knew, a little one in the rue Cujas, just a stone's throw from the Bar des Faux Monnayeurs. Our room, which gave on the centre courtyard, was the same one in which I had suffered so many privations during my student years. As I had done then, I went down every morning to the bar to read the papers and drink a scanty *café-crème*. But there were too many Russians in this bar and I was afraid someone might recognize us. I soon managed to get Moravagine as far as the corner and, turning right, we began to frequent the cafés of the boulevard Saint-Michel. Venturing a little farther each day, we quickly reached the Seine, and as in all these cafés we still saw too many Russians, we took the resolute step of crossing the water. We then moved, setting up our household gods in a shady hotel in the neighbourhood of the Bastille.

Paris, great city of solitudes, thick brush and human jungle! We were out the whole day. We went wherever our noses led us, now along the gloomy boulevard de l'Hôpital, the Gobelins, Port-Royal, Montparnasse, the Invalides towards the rue de Grenelle, now on the boulevards Richard-Lenoir, la Chapelle, la Villette, Clichy aux Ternes, right to the Porte Maillot. We'd go home via the Fortifs at any old time of the day or night.

It was the end of winter and it was cold.

We'd trot along one behind the other in the drizzle. Passing buses splashed us with muddy water. We would eat

standing on a street corner, where we'd bought a few pennyworth of chips or a slice of pot roast. There were too many women in the restaurants and big cafés. There were too many women in Paris. We chose little deserted bars where we could be quiet and sometimes spend the whole day.

All these cafés were the same, and everywhere it was the same story. They were all bubbling with the same obsession. All that people talked about was the Bonnot robbery. In these tiny cafés, smelling of cats and sawdust, grown musty in the shadows of shabby town-halls on the deserted squares of this or that quarter of the city, three benches in front, a crippled pissoir, a wall plastered with smeared election posters, lit by the spastic blinking of a triple street lamp, we discovered to our stupefaction a whole world of horrid and terrified *petits bourgeois*. In Passy, in Auteuil, in the city's centre, in Montrouge or Saint-Ouen or Ménilmontant, everybody was muttering the same bits of gossip. A petty crime relished by a paltry public. Wobbly benches. Card games in suspension . . . 1848. Garnier, Bonnot, Rirette Maîtrejean were the great sensations, for we're still romantically inclined in France, and it's boring here, and what's more, as an owner of property . . . Could this be Paris?

'Would you look at them? Look at them, now, this bunch of farmers,' Moravagine said to me. 'It can't be true! And these are the Parisians that the whole world envies!'

We were in a little wine-merchant's shop in the boulevard Exelmans. A collector's runner, a coachman, and a small, puny, little old man were drinking at the counter. The neighbourhood concierges came in from time to time to buy a pennyworth of snuff. People with shoddy parcels under their arms came and went. A mangy dog was lying near the stove. The proprietor had a great reddish fleck on his face near the eye. The waiter was cretinous.

'Look at them, would you! They're scared stiff of losing their savings. It can't be true. There must be something

more to this country than this frightful passion for money—it's Balzacian, it's a thing of the past, it's exaggerated and hateful.'

But where is one to look for new attitudes, for real men, in this country which has become banker to the world? In France every form of life is cramped within the straitjacket of official legalism. Think of the Academician's pretty uniform. Compulsory education has a splendid way of pruning the personality. Children learn conformity. Respect for form is drilled into them. Good tone, good taste, good manners. The lifetime of the French family is squandered in a series of solemnly ridiculous and outmoded ceremonies. The only flourishing emotion is boredom. The adolescent's only ambition is to become a civil servant as soon as possible, like his father. Law offices, big funerals, tradition. Napoleon peopled Paris with statues. A pale allegory, the Louvre appears on certain days transparent and bluish like a giant bank note; and indeed (like paper money that represents nothing when the state treasury is exhausted) the Louvre without its kings, France without its former Provinces, and the French citizen printed in standard lots on Declarations of the Rights of Man, like hoarded Confederate dollars, lose their currency and are worth nothing.

If in 1912 the whole world still scrambled for this currency that was France, it was because everyone wanted to possess some part of a stereotype, a 'little woman', a trollop, in a word, Paris—whence the bankruptcy of the Third Republic which perished giving birth one after the other to a Sarah Bernhardt, a Cecile Sorel, a Rirette Maîtrejean or, a little later, mother Caillaux. But not a man in a car-load, not one.

Where could it be, France's true gold, its Newness, the New Men?

Instinctively we searched for them.

The weeks went by. More and more often we came back to the neighbourhood of Ternes. There, far from the artists and intellectuals, unknown to the politicians, notaries and

teachers, immense halls were open to the public. Everything was in gold. The cinemas, the dance halls, the boxing rings. The enormous Palace full of automatic machines. A clean and tidy public thronged these places, men of youthful elegance, women in jersey sweaters. Here one was far removed from England, America or China, and yet in close communion with the whole world. These people spoke frankly, clearly, and not in whispers. Even during their recreation they kept talking of their jobs. One had the feeling that they were harnessed to an immense task of which their amusement and leisure were also a part. This is the kind of thing that can give life a new impetus and reform whole societies.

Splendid folk of Levallois-Perret and Courbevoie, men in engineers' overalls, men of the car and aeroplane trade, we followed your groups at play and we were still there when, next morning, you made your way to work. Boulogne factories at Suresnes. The only communes in Paris where children ran in the streets. Now we went nowhere but to the canteens of this zone and the brilliant aperitif concerts in the evening. Chicken and game every Saturday. There are great billiard halls, giant gramophones and shining new slot machines. Money flows. Nobody counts his pennies. High appetite, gaiety, luxury, new music, new songs, new dances. Big families. World records. Travel. Altitudes and longitudes, illustrated magazines, sports. They talk in horse-power. They work with the latest techniques. They are up on the latest in applied science. They believe devoutly in the new superstitions. They risk their lives every day. They give themselves. They give of themselves. Without stinting. How far removed we are here from the old tradition so dear to purists. And yet you are the only thing that's real, the only thing that's French, you, the admirable folk of Levallois-Perret and Courbevoie, you in the blue overalls, people of the car and aeroplane trade. You're all tough cookies, every one an ace.

One day as we were prowling about Saint-Cloud from

one pleasure-garden and little bar to another, we came on a crew of twenty-three strapping fellows soaking up champagne with great gusto. This was the crew of the Borel aircraft, the bamboo plane, the machine with the variable-incidence wing which in less than eight days had just beaten every world record for flight duration and altitude, with one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three passengers.

Not bad. And what a job!

(p) Aviation

Moravagine was now a pilot. A strut-buster. For three months we'd been living at Chartres. I had taken a room in a high, square, naked structure perched between the two towers of the cathedral. I had a lease for two years. From my height I could watch the clean lines of the hangars being built for the airfield on the flat land that lay beyond.

My room was furnished with a little iron bed, a great bathtub, a chair and a little table of white wood. There were blueprints tacked to the walls.

I had again surrounded myself with a collection of books. I had resumed my studies, but I wasn't writing a line. I read all day, installed on a little balcony two hundred feet above the city square; the church bells counted the hours for me; as I read, my back-rest was an enormous gargoyle in the form of a braying ass with a hat on. The weather was too fine, my head grew too heavy. I couldn't concentrate on the book. The whole universe was whirling through my head, along with all the things that had happened in those ten years of intense life shared with Moravagine.

Slowly, the hours passed and struck, one by one.

From time to time a shadow came travelling across my open book. It was Moravagine's aeroplane coming between me and the sun. Then I would raise my head and stare for a long while at this graceful, fragile machine wheeling and curving, spiralling up and dropping in a corkscrew or like a falling leaf, now on one wing, now on the other, recovering, looping the loop above the town to disappear finally in a glory of light.

The sunlight was hot as fire. It was summer.

Every evening I came down from my tower and went to meet Moravagine at the Hotel du Grand Monarque on the square. He was always at the last table, at the rear of the dining-room. I could see him smiling at me as soon as I came in. Facing him, with his back to me, sat a man whose blue serge jacket had three even, horizontal pleats between the shoulders. It was Bastien Champcommunal, the inventor.

We had met Champcommunal one night in les Halles, at the 'Père Tranquille', in the upper room, where for once we had risked appearing among the ill-assorted couples and the women in hobble-skirts relishing the joys of the tango. We were sitting at a little corner table. We had just had a respectable supper and emptied a few bottles of Burgundy. Beside us and a little in front, at right-angles to our table, a big, bearded man had been making signs to us for a good fifteen minutes. His beard grew right to his eyes and great tufts of hair jutted from his ears. His dress was in some disorder and he was completely drunk. At one point he tried to get up and reeled against our table, upsetting bottles and glasses. It was Champcommunal.

'Gentlemen,' he said, maintaining an awkward balance on the bench by laying his great, hairy paw on Moravagine's shoulder, 'gentlemen, I like your looks, allow me to lift a glass to your health and order a fresh bottle.'

Between two hiccups he bellowed to the waiter : 'Garçon, a Mercurey !' Then, turning to us again, he continued : 'It's easy to see that you've travelled a great deal. Travel is an education for the you—you—young, and makes them waste a lot of time. I wasted much of my you—you—youth, which means that I travelled widely.'

He was clinging to Moravagine for dear life with both hands.

'Yes, gentlemen,' he went on, 'my father sent me off to the forests of Canada, and it was there that I suddenly had the idea for my aeroplane, an astounding aeroplane which would fly forwards, backwards and straight up. It was

complete in my head. I didn't need to go through a lot of calculations. The equations I wrote down in a big school notebook came to me without effort. I never had to revise my formulas or check them out. Everything was exact, everything worked. But I had to wait three years before I could begin to build it. Waiter!' he bellowed again, 'a Mercurey!—and he poured another round. 'Great stuff, eh? To your health, gentlemen.'

And he went on in a voice growing thicker and thicker: 'My father was the Chief Justice. He wouldn't listen to a word about my plane. That's why I had to wait for three years on that God-forsaken farm in Canada, chopping trees or pulling stumps or ploughing deep furrows, floundering in the mud, leaning on the plough with all my weight, heavy, filthy, besmeared, doubled over the plough-handles, bent over the black earth, bent as one is always bent when one is obliged to labour the soil, I, who knew I was meant to fly, to free myself one day from the laws of gravity and travel as fast as light. Those were hard times. I only returned to France last year on my father's death, and since then I've managed regularly to crash two or three times a month. Waiter! A Mercurey! And this'll be the last. There's the end of my cash. Come and see me one of these fine days,' he said, as we drank this last bottle. 'I hang out in Chartres. I've bought a potato-field. I've built a little Canadian cabin that does for hangar, workshop and living quarters. I batch it there with a good pal of mine who lends a hand with the work. Come and see me. Got to go now, have to see how my kite's coming on.'

Champcommunal, now on his feet, treated the waiter to a body-check in the process of emptying his wallet into the man's hand. He went out. We saw him a few moments later at the check-room. He could hardly stay on his feet. He jostled us without recognizing us.

'There's a character,' said Moravagine. 'Let's give him a hand. He'll never get home on his own.'

Champcommunal had hailed a taxi and then fallen on

his face on the pavement. The driver had almost run over him. With the help of the porter we installed Champcommunal in the car and, as he had mentioned Chartres, we drove to the Montparnasse station. A pale blue dawn was breaking. The colours of the mountains of cabbages and carrots were offensively crude to our tired eyes. There was a fine, strong, market-garden smell. Working-women regaled us with a piece of their mind as they drew aside to make way for the taxi in which Champcommunal was sleeping off his wine, flat on his back, red-faced and hairy.

At the station the first slow train of the morning was about to leave. Champcommunal was still not awake. What a boozer! We hoisted him into a third-class compartment. Then, after a short council of war, we left with him. In Chartres a jolting carriage, a real spine-crusher, drove us to the airfield.

It was at the back limit of a lonely prairie, nothing but a few miserable shacks. Broken wings served as a fence. Bits of framework, struts, perforated bits of wood lay about in the grass like scattered bones. Dinted jerry-cans, old tins, packing cloth and used tyres bordered the runway. As the earth was being levelled off with the city's garbage, the whole plain was covered with bits of broken glass and pottery glittering in the sun. Thousands of unmatched shoes shrivelled and hardened in the open air. Our feet tangled in old bed springs. Every few steps we stumbled over chunks of scrap iron.

Champcommunal showed no desire to walk.

We recognized his house at once from the fact that it was made of unhewn logs. We pushed back the sliding door.

'Here she is,' shouted Champcommunal enthusiastically, having escaped from our hands and climbed into the cockpit of his plane. 'Take a look at this aerofoil! And see, no tail! The elevator surface is underneath. The wingtips have warp controls.'

He moved a lever and pushed pedals to show us what he meant. It was a fact, we saw the cables stretch like fiddle-strings and the wingtips moved.

'This is going to take me around the world, and it's going to be a first.'

The plane was an old machine that had been rebuilt. It was patched and dirty. One wheel was missing from the landing-gear. Some of the struts were broken. The numerous rips in the fuselage were mended with sticking-tape. There was no floor beneath the cockpits. Black oil pissed from the motor. The joints in the fuel line were bound with string. The propeller had been taken off.

'It's finished. She's in perfect shape now. I tinker at it every day. Twice I almost killed myself in it,' said Champcommunal, looking tenderly at the machine.

We wandered round and round the great yellow triplane.

The hangar was littered with tools and spare parts. A second plane was under construction. There was a motor on the bench. An iron bed stood in a corner, a hammock hung behind the stove. There was a little forge at the back, and a large lathe and workbench before the window. A man stood at the bench. He was young. Neither our arrival nor Champcommunal's immoderate shouting had distracted him from his work. He had not turned his head, not once. He was intent on what he was doing. With the aid of a compass he was tracing guide-marks on a wooden propeller.

'Come and eat breakfast,' Champcommunal said to him. 'Leave your logarithms and all that mess. We're taking the day off, and we're going to get plastered.'

And, turning to us :

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'allow me to introduce to you my second in command, Blaise Cendrars.'

Then, when he'd ducked his head in a basin of cold water, he went on, 'Let's go to the Grand Monarque, let's go and eat breakfast.'

The inventor was a ruined man. Moravagine provided funds and nine months after this first meeting Champ-

communal's new plane was ready. They'd built it under the utmost secrecy. This was the plane that came disturbing me in my tower, keeping me from reading and thinking. I couldn't wait for it to go. These flights were its final tests. It was in the last half of July; it was supposed to leave during the first week of August. I was anxious to see it go, for I hadn't wanted to take part in this new escapade of which Moravagine was the moving spirit.

He had dreamed up a plan for flying around the world. Cendrars, Champcommunal and he were to take off any day. He had taken Champcommunal's original plan and perfected and amplified it.

It had grown to a world-wide business proposition.

Moravagine had been in touch with the most celebrated tourist resorts, the transatlantic lines, the great sports organizations, the learned societies, and the press in every country. He had issued challenges and made bets. As he had arranged it, the flight should bring in some nine hundred million francs. The whole world was awaiting his exploits.

Here was the programme: First take-off, first demonstration: Chartres to Interlaken, the aircraft landing on the summit of the Jungfrau and then descending to the Casino in a glide. Exhibition of the machine, lectures by Blaise Cendrars, interviews, press releases, great feats, a world record, prizes and donations.

Second take-off, second demonstration: Interlaken to London, participation in the annual speed and endurance race around England, exhibition, lectures, interviews, press releases, prizes, donations, records set, *Daily Mail* Prize, final signature of agreements already made, official opening of betting, deposit of a million-franc pledge with the Bank of England.

Third take-off, third demonstration: a circuit of world capitals, lectures, publicity, advertising, in Paris, Brussels, the Hague, Hamburg, Berlin, Copenhagen, Christiania, Stockholm, Helsingfors, St Petersburg, Moscow.

Official closing of European betting. Next stage: first lap of the world tour, Moscow to Tokyo in sixty hours of flight, with stops at Orenburg, Omsk, Tomsk, Irkutsk, Tchita, Mukden, Peking, Seoul and Tokyo.

Tokyo: official closing of betting in Asia and departure for the next lap of the round-the-world flight. First aerial connection between Asia and America. First Pacific crossing via Vladivostok, Nicolayevsk, Petropavlovsk, the Isle of Rats, the Aleutians (Fox Island), the tip of Alaska (Kartuk), Sitka, Queen Charlotte Island and Vancouver.

First American lap: Victoria, Olympia, Salem, San Francisco.

San Francisco: exhibition of the craft, lectures by Blaise Cendrars, interviews, press releases, prizes, donations, receptions, grand prize of the City of San Francisco, etc.

Third lap of the world tour: crossing of the American continent, an aerial crawl from town to town with exhibitions, lectures, advertising, grand publicity tour organized with Barnum as manager.

Arrival in New York with a maximum of sensationalism, grand prize of a million dollars given by the *New York Herald*.

Winter in New York, building of a new aircraft with which to cross the Atlantic. Sale of patents, membership in the American Society which will sponsor mass production of this type of plane, etc.

In the spring, closing of American betting, take-off on the last lap: first aerial connection made between America and Europe; London and Paris after a visit to Montreal and Quebec, forty-eight hours in flight across the Atlantic, grand prize of £100,000 sterling from the British Press Union, etc., etc. . . .

'All the banks are getting in the act. You'll see what I can squeeze out of this machine,' Moravagine explained to me. 'Glory, fortune, honours, public enthusiasm, screaming crowds. I'll be master of the world. I'll have myself proclaimed God. We'll upset their applecart, wait and see.'

'.....'

'So you don't want to come along? Really not? Oh, very well, we won't mention it again. It's too late now anyway. Your place has been taken by a spare tank, which gives us a tremendous reserve supply of petrol. The plane is tuned up, ready to go. We leave in three days . . . '

'.....'

'It's a pity you aren't coming. You could have done some filming on board. I'd counted on you to bring along a camera. Now we won't be doing any film at all. Oh, well Apart from that, everything's tip-top. You're the only thing that's not working right I can understand your wanting to rest and get back to your books. Of course you need to think things over, you always needed time to think about a whole pile of things, to look, to see, to compare and record, to take notes on the thousand things you haven't had a chance to classify in your own mind. But why don't you leave that to the police archives? Haven't you got it through your head that human thought is a thing of the past and that philosophy is worse than Bertillon's guide to harassed cops? You make me laugh with your metaphysical anguish, it's just that you're scared silly, frightened of life, of men of action, of action itself, of lack of order. But everything is disorder, dear boy. Vegetable, mineral and animal, all disorder, and so is the multitude of human races, the life of man, thought, history, wars, inventions, business and the arts, and all theories, passions and systems. It's always been that way. Why are you trying to make something out of it? And what will you make? What are you looking for? There's no truth. There's only action, action obeying a million different impulses, ephemeral action, action subjected to every possible and imaginable contingency and contradiction, Life. Life is crime, theft, jealousy, hunger, lies, disgust, stupidity, sickness, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, piles of corpses. What can you do about it, my poor friend? You're not about to start laying books, are you?'

Moravagine was so right that three days later, a Sunday, the day chosen for their marvellous take-off, war was on, the Great War, 2nd August, 1914.

(q) The War

I joined my regiment on the first day. I shall not pretend that it was, as in the song, '*Mon beau régiment*'. It was, rather, a lousy regiment of clod-hoppers. We'd been nicknamed the 'Threepenny Furniture Movers', for we were veritable cannon-fodder and were used to plug holes and sent to every part of the front where there was a dirty job to be done or some unexpected devilry to be dealt with

I knew that Moravagine had joined the flying corps, but I had no news of him whatsoever. I thought of him constantly. No, really, I had nothing in common with the poor devils around me; it was he who occupied all my thoughts during the long nights on the front. He kept watch with me on the parapets, he was at my side when we went over the top, he dipped his hand into the same mess-tin. His presence lit up my gloomy trench. On patrol he would put into my head Red-Indian ruses for avoiding ambush. Behind the lines I was able to put up with everything, vexations, jeers, servile labours, by thinking of the life he had led in prison. He kept my morale high and gave me the health and physical courage not to flinch, and he later gave me the energy and optimism I needed to pick myself up from the battlefield after my hideous wound. I thought only of him as I went back from Navarin Farm, using two rifles for crutches, picking my way through barbed wire and bursting shells, leaving behind me a long trail of blood

Though I could learn nothing of Moravagine, I read the papers avidly. The world news was an absurdity, and this war was moronic. God, what big words! Liberty,

Justice, the Autonomy of Peoples, Civilization. I laughed to myself when I thought of Moravagine. How could the nations still be victim of all these lies? What a joke! We hadn't beat about the bush there in Russia, when we were knocking off one Grand Duke after another. Ah, if only Moravagine had then had all these arms and treasures and factories and gas and cannons at his disposal, from every part of the world! Why didn't he appear to us? He'd soon finish off the job begun by the war. Why wasn't he at the head of this universal killing contest, intensifying it, speeding it up, bringing it to a swift end? To hell with humanity. Destruction. The end of the world. Full stop

One day the *Petit Parisien* informed me that a French aviator had just flown over Vienna, that he had dropped bombs on the Hofburg and that, on his return flight, he had been shot down behind the Austrian lines.

Intuition told me at once that this could only have been Moravagine.

What a soft-head!

Revenging himself on the Emperor. Taking advantage of the war to settle an old family feud. Revenging his ancestors.

What insignificant pettiness!

Moravagine had let slip the most magnificent chance of his life. He had gone off to hunt Franz-Joseph when the whole world was doing a 'Moravagine' and I—I was waiting for him to arise and destroy the nations!

What a yellow-belly!

My disappointment was bitter

(r) Sainte Marguerite Island

I've lost a leg in the war, the left one.

I drag myself around in the sunlight like a miserable cripple.

I'm wild with rage.

I burst out laughing.

Nothing's changed behind the lines. Life is even more stupid than before.

I came across Cendrars in a hospital in Cannes. He's had his right arm amputated. He tells me Champcommunal was killed at the Maison du Passeur. No one has heard of Moravagine.

I hang about in the sunlit streets like a suffering paraplegic. I sit around on benches. I don't read the papers. I speak to no one. The sky is blue. There's not a sail on the sea. Every Thursday, along with other amputees and wounded under treatment at the Carlton, I take the motor-boat ride to Sainte Marguerite Island.

The Island is green and sweet-smelling. There is a fine beach where the wounded go swimming or take sun-baths. Not I. I stop short of that. The green groves have no attraction for me. Nor the blue grotto. Nor the waves that come from the open sea to break on the point of the promontory. Nor the seventy-five gun set up to deal with submarines. I don't leave the immediate area of the wharf. First there's a steep stairway, a kind of Saracen gangway leading to the fort. I follow it to the top. A rusty old grille bars off the esplanade cut into the rock. The square is filled with sunlight, and there is a good smell of tamarind trees.

The grille is always closed. Through its twisted bars one

can see the casemates of the unused fort hanging above the sea. I can discern the little windows of a prison through the low ilex branches. Through one of those windows Marshal Bazaine let himself down by a rope into a waiting boat and had the courage to run away to Spain, to live surrounded by public contempt, to die in dishonour.

It's a quiet spot. I usually settle down in a deserted lookout tower and wait for evening and the sound of the boat's siren. I'm always easily the last one on the wharf. Everyone else is already in the boat. My comrades shout, 'Get a move on, buddy, or we'll miss our soup again.' And old man Baptistin, who takes my crutches and gives me a hand getting aboard, grumbles, 'God damn it, you've only got one leg and you have to go playing mountain goat up the rocks. Can't you stay quiet and be back on time like everybody else?'

No, I can't stay quiet and be back on time like the others. I have to get away, I have to be alone. I have to wear myself out. I have to succeed in climbing the two hundred steps of that stairway without stopping, without getting out of puff. I have to forget everything in order to find myself again. The place is empty. From up there I can see the water darken beneath the wind. This is how I must harden my will. I don't want to think of Moravagine. I feel that I'm making great decisions. I must. My life is not ended.

On a certain Thursday I found the grille half-open and my watchtower occupied. A sign hung uneasily in the wind. I read, in large stencilled letters, NEUROLOGICAL CENTRE NO. 101-B. A little soldier was talking to himself in the tower. He was a pale creature, fleshless and nervous. An unhealthy white showed through his skin. He told me his name was Souriceau. He at once wanted to know my name, and asked a great many questions. He was unarmed, and his uniform was beltless. His overcoat swallowed him like a cassock. It was soiled and faded from going through the disinfecting oven.

Souriceau gave me no time to answer his questions. He talked to himself with great volubility. He told me about his war. All at once he took me by the arm, led me swiftly into the look-out and then, having made sure that no one was nearby to spy on us or eavesdrop, he confided to me, enjoining strict secrecy and whispering in my ear: 'I'm not really wounded, you know. Look, look here, I . . . I've lost my regiment.'

He unbuttoned his greatcoat and showed me the collar of his jacket. It was true, the lapels bore no regimental badge.

'Look, look at that,' he said feverishly, 'I haven't got a number, I have no dog-tags, I have no pay-book, I've lost everything. Isn't that a strange thing? I've even lost my regiment.'

He turned his pockets inside out.

'You see, I've nothing left at all. I've lost everything. I've even lost my regiment.'

He was a poor madman who'd lost his regiment in the war, who'd lost his reason in the war, who'd lost everything. He was a madman, a poor madman.

I looked at him.

I looked at the sign and then at the grilled gate, and went inside. I went inside that Thursday and every Thursday after.

(s) Morphine

Neurological Centre No. 101-B has some sixty phenomena within its walls. In addition to Souriceau, 'the soldier who lost his regiment', and another poor devil who thinks he is still on a parapet and assumes in bed the regulation firing position, every psychic affliction caused by battle fatigue is to be found there, precipitated by fear, exhaustion, under-nourishment, illness and wounds. It can be certified that the madmen shut in here are not lead-swingers, nor are they simply tired or neurasthenic. They have all earned the chevrons of madness in the Army's various neurological centres where they have spent time under observation and been interrogated, selected and screened by many commissions of experts before being relegated, by stages, to 101-B. The Centre's director, Dr Montalti, a Corsican with five rings on his uniform-sleeve, thus has every reason to consider himself lucky. There's never a shirker or scrounger or malingerer in his wards; there's never a single soldier can be rehabilitated out of his prison. His conscience is clear. France can relax. He runs a tight shop and would be the first to give the about turn to any of those damned practical jokers who invent aches and pains as they go along and pretend to be mad to avoid going back under fire. His patients are dangerous devils, and someone has to keep an eye on them if only in the interests of science.

The Doctor's principal helper is Miss Germaine Soyez, a violent female with ginger-coloured hair who holds the big stick over the patients as if they were criminals and terrorizes the army medics who report to her. She'll post you to Verdun just like that, and not a word of warning.

Thus she is the one who makes the sun shine and the rain fall around the place, and even Montalti is scared stiff of her. I don't know how I succeeded in hitting it off with her but I did, from the very first time I turned up in her office. She held the rank of Major in the Nursing Corps, had the chest of a Prussian general and wore the ribbon of the Order of Commander of the Red Cross. I do know that her arrogant look softened somewhat when I mentioned my professor and friend Dr d'Entraigues, and it was almost with a smile that this authoritarian personage gave me permission to visit the establishment.

Fort Sainte Marguerite is a fortification that has been out of service for a very long time. During the last half of the nineteenth century it was used as a military prison for officers condemned to 'reclusion in a fortified place'. One might say that if the location is charming, there is nothing enchanting about a prolonged stay there, for the courtyards, the moats, the fortified curtains, the bastions, the drill-squares, the glacis and redoubts bristle with pointed palisades or are strewn with other sharp pitfalls. I never saw in any work of masonry such a multiplicity of spear-points, palings, spikes, thorn-bushes and brambles. The very doors were armed in plate and studded like ancient Genoan strong-boxes. Immense padlocks and complicated security systems had to be opened before one could penetrate to the cramped dormitories and little cells with their heavily-barred windows. It was to this medieval Bastille that, in 1916, the War Offices had had the brilliant idea of sending the Army's mad; the utterly mad, the incurables, the useless, the dregs of asylums, hospices, hospitals and other dumps. Every three months, with great regularity, a commission of aged generals came to see if there wasn't a *scrimshanker* they could lay hands on and send back to the front at the double.

I wasn't a general, and I didn't want to lay hands on anyone. In fact, I'd be hard put to it to say what impelled me to go back every Thursday to this scene of misery. I

have never taken much pleasure in the sufferings of others, and do not willingly show tenderness to my own. And yet I must admit that the horror of the place was in harmony with my state of mind, and that I felt to the very depths of my bowels the shame of being human and of having taken part in these events. Gloomy satisfaction ! Is there a more monstrous thought, a more convincing spectacle, a more patent affirmation of the impotence and madness of the brain? War. All our philosophies, religions, arts, techniques and trades lead to nothing but this. The finest flowers of civilization. The purest constructions of thought. The most generous and altruistic passions of the heart. The most heroic gestures of man. War. Now and a thousand years ago. Tomorrow and a hundred thousand years ago. No, it's not a question of your country, my German or French friend, or yours, whether you're black or white or Papuan or a Borneo monkey. It's a question of your life. If you want to live, kill. Kill so that you can be free, or eat, or shit. The shameful thing is to kill in masses, at a pre-determined hour on a predetermined day, in honour of certain principles, under cover of a flag, with old men nodding approval, to kill in a disinterested or passive way. Stand alone against them all, young man, kill, kill, you are unique, you're the only man alive, kill until the others cut you short with the guillotine or the cord or the rope, with or without ceremony, in the name of the Community or the King.

What a laugh.

I wandered through the courtyards and galleries, on the ramparts and glacis, in the fortified and covered ways and along the watchmen's paths. It seemed to me I was inside someone's head. This masterly, complicated and well-conceived construction of impregnable breastworks, bastions, salients and redoubts appeared to me like a petrified cast of the brain, and in these halls of stone, among the iron grilles and the *chevaux de frise*, I stumped along on my crutches, aggressive and vicious as a crippled thought

inside the mind of man, thought in its solitude, thought in its liberty. Every opening on to the outside world is an embrasure for a cannon.

One day—it was the fourth or fifth time that I was strolling freely about the fort—I heard shrill screams coming from an isolated bastion. Miss Soyez, who passed me on the run, waved to me to follow her.

'Come along,' she cried. 'It's the morphine addict, he's having his crisis.'

I tailed after her, hobbling as fast as I could.

When I reached the room, Miss Soyez was leaning over the patient, who was struggling and howling: 'Not there, not there, I tell you I can't feel it, and you're going to waste another shot.'

'You've made me miss three already, you idiot. Where do you want your shot, then? Where?' she replied, in a rage.

'In my nose! In my nose or in my . . . ?'

They were beneath disgust, both of them. I looked around me. I was in a large room. The low ceiling was arched. Thick bars blocked the window which hung over the sea. It was in the most ancient part of the fort, where sunlight never penetrates. The room was like ice. It was in a fury of disorder. The whole tiled floor was covered with sheets of paper, handwritten pages laid side by side. There were hundreds of them, thousands. They lay on all the furniture, on the table, on the chair, on a bench. Some were stuck to the wall. There were piles of them, heaps of them in the corners. They filled a great trunk to bursting. I was treading on them where I stood. Miss Soyez and the patient crumpled them as they struggled.

Miss Soyez had just finished her little operation and was explaining to me that this was an incurable maniac, one so hardened that all feeling had left his body, and the only places one could give him the needle were in his nose or his . . .

'Moravagine!' I shouted, recognizing the patient, who

had just stood up and was buttoning his trousers, for Miss Soyez had at first tried to insert the needle in his buttock.

‘What ! You know him?’ asked Germaine Soyez, thunderstruck.

‘I do indeed, Mademoiselle. It’s my brother.’

(t) The Planet Mars

Moravagine was in an unimaginable state of exaltation. He would spend twenty-three hours a day at his writing table. In six months he had scribbled more than 10,000 pages, which represents more than sixty pages a day. He kept going only with the help of morphine. Under these conditions I could hardly ask him questions or proceed with the inquiry that was justified and called-for by the adventures of my fabulous friend.

Be that as it may, he was no longer of this world. He thought he was on the planet Mars. And when I came to see him, regularly, every Thursday, he would clutch my arm, demanding loudly to go back to earth, groping high above his head with both hands for soil and trees and domestic animals.

He never mentioned his fellow-men.

I am not completely sure that he recognized me.

(u) The Iron Mask

Moravagine died on 17th February, 1917, in that same room which had been inhabited for so long under Louis XIV by the individual known to history as the Man in the Iron Mask. A pure anecdotal coincidence with no symbolic value.

Moravagine died on 17th February, 1917, at the age of fifty-one. As it was not a Thursday, I was unable to be present during his last moments—I, the only friend he had ever had. It was also impossible for me to be at his burial, which took place on a Wednesday.

It was not until the next day, a Thursday, that Miss Soyez told me he had passed away, and was so kind as to get me a carbon of the report Dr Montalti addressed to the competent Authorities concerning the deceased.

Here follows a faithful copy of this astonishing funeral oration :

There are in the encephalon certain regions whose functions remain, even today, despite the considerable research which has been devoted to them, obscure and mysterious. The region of the third ventricle and that of the infundibulum are among them.

Complicating the problem and rendering the interpretation of experimental results more difficult is the fact that we must deal not only with the structural complexity of the interpeduncular region but also with the proximity of a glandular structure whose activity, while it is not yet clearly defined, appears to exert some influence upon the organism as a whole. We refer to the hypophysis.

As is known, numerous series of experiments have seemed to demonstrate that the stimulation or ablation of the hypophysis provokes important alterations in circulation, respiration, the metabolism, the renal secretions and in growth, to mention only the most striking.

The anatomo-clinical method has, so far as the present problem is concerned, furnished us with few indisputable facts. The reason for this is the relative rarity of lesions completely limited to the region of the infundibulum. In the immense majority of cases we are, in fact, faced with tubercular or (especially) syphilitic excrescences which, through their dispersal and the toxic substances they emit at a distance, fail to localize their harmful effects within a precise zone.

We have had the opportunity recently to follow for some time the case of a patient afflicted with a neoplastic interpeduncular lesion, where a series of symptoms attracted our attention by their physiological interest. We should like to report briefly upon them, for they allow of more precision in, and throw much light upon, one area of the semiology of the infundibular and interpeduncular regions. They allow us to sketch a description of the infundibular syndrome which has been indicated in various observations of pituitary tumours and more recently in a case of tumour of the epiphysis reported by Warren and Tilney,* but which has never to our knowledge appeared as clearly as in the case of which we are writing:

The patient was a man of fifty-one, M . . . an aeroplane pilot. In his personal history we find several attacks of malaria and, five years ago, a syphilitic chancre.

In April, 1916, he is evacuated from Austria by way of Switzerland and treated for anaemia for four months at the hospital in Beaune.

* Warren and F. Tilney: 'Tumours of the Pineal Body with Invasion of the Midbrain, Thalamus, Hypothalamus and Pituitary Body'. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases*, January, 1917.

Admitted 18th September, 1916, to the Centre of Neurology, No. 101-B, the patient appears to us to be rather puny, visibly skinny and pale. Questioning reveals that for many months he has been eating badly, has lost his appetite, has lost weight and felt his strength ebb away. Asthenia is at this point pronounced and the subject cannot carry out any work requiring a sustained effort. His sleep, moreover, is troubled, and the patient is obliged to drink several times during the night.

An examination of the various organs reveals nothing out of the ordinary. One notes a slight increase in the volume of the spleen, and a respiratory shadow on the upper right. It is impossible to detect any organic symptom of the nervous system apart from ocular troubles. The latter, according to the subject, came about gradually, and take the form of enfeebled vision. This amblyopia is not, however, such that it prevents the patient from walking or recognizing the persons around him. He reads with difficulty and can identify only capital letters.

Since his admission an augmentation in the quantity of urine had been noted, the count varying between 2 and $2\frac{1}{2}$ litres. Urinalysis reveals no abnormal elements.

This polyuria is accompanied, as we have seen, by polydipsia, but not polyphagia, and there is no trace of glycosuria.

A lumbar puncture permits us to observe a clear liquid, slight hypertension (22 on an H. Claude manometer), and a content of 0.56 albumen along with numerous lymphocytes. No reaction was observed following the puncture.

The ocular examination performed by Monsieur Cotonnet, chief physician at the ophthalmological centre in Cannes, brings to light a typical and complete bitemporal hemianopsia unaccompanied by either stasis or ocular paralysis. The right pupil appears discoloured in the nasal segment, the blood vessels are normal. The

left pupil is even more discoloured, again in the nasal segment. The pupillary reflexes of the right eye are present but diminished, those of the left are also present but barely perceptible. Vision is much reduced but allows the patient to recognize objects put before him.

We ourselves have observed the extreme variability of the diameter of the iris, now extremely large and now abnormally small.

Because of the specific history of the patient and the existence of lymphocytosis with noticeable albuminosis of the cephalo-rachidian liquid, we institute the intensive treatment indicated and come to a diagnosis of gummosous basilar meningitis affecting the chiasmus and the region of the *tuber cinereum*.

Not more than a few days had passed before the patient began to show a series of interesting disturbances : the pulse, from being irregular, becomes completely arrhythmic and slack. The beating of the heart is less pronounced, and somewhat muffled. The arterial pressure (Pachon) is 15 max. and 9 min. Extrasystoles are to be noted from time to time.

An examination of the blood reveals nothing unusual : only a slight lymphocytosis.

On 10th October, that is, a week after beginning the specific treatment, the patient develops disturbances in his speech, which grows slow, sing-song, drawling and monotonous, after the fashion of those afflicted with dysarthria of the pseudo-bulbaries. No dysphagia.

We suspend the specific treatment.

On 22nd October the disturbances of articulation have disappeared, as have the irregularities of the pulse. Everything seems to be in order again, when, suddenly, on 23rd October, the subject falls into a profound sleep from which it is impossible to arouse him. This narcoleptic crisis, lasting some five hours, leaves the subject amnesiac and astonished when he awakes. A note-

worthy fact : this amnesia extends not only over the period of narcolepsia but backwards to the time preceding his admission to the hospital. He is unable to remember when he came to Neurological Centre No. 101-B or how long he has been under treatment here.

An examination of the different functions of the nervous system has completely negative results, and reflectivity and sensitivity as well as motor functions and trophicity are intact.

The disturbance of the memory which we have noted lasted only a very short time, and had disappeared entirely three or four days after the narcoleptic crisis.

On 26th November, 1916, we note the appearance with no apparent cause of cardio-vascular phenomena analogous to those seen previously. The cardiac palpitations accelerate and the pulse reading is 136 per minute. We notice a typical embryocardic rhythm with weakening of the heart sound.

On 30th November, the patient shows complete amaurosis. 'I am in the darkest night,' he says. The general condition undergoes a change, loss of weight continues. The patient, for that matter, does not eat well, and ever since his admission has shown a notable and persistent lack of appetite.

The instability of diameter in the iris is still very pronounced. Urinalysis produces the same results : an absence of any abnormal element and no augmentation in volume over a twenty-four hour period, i.e. $2\frac{1}{2}$ litres.

26th December, 1916. The subject's cachexy is progressively aggravated and symptoms of baccilosis become marked in the upper right lung. Suddenly, without any observable cause, the patient is seized by a confusional delirium with oneirism. He states that his bed is damp from rain and sea-fog; he imagines that he is on the Orinoco in springtime [*sic!*].

He is unaware of the gravity of his condition ; on the

contrary, he has manifested for some days a state of euphoria in sharp contrast with reality.

Until the very end the patient maintains this feeling of euphoria which impels him to say each day that he is in a superior world, in another place, that he feels better, that he will soon be getting up and leaving to convalesce, etc.

From 1st January 1917, to 17th February no new pathological phenomenon becomes apparent. His mental state remains unaltered as do his polyuria and polydipsia. On several occasions the patient suffers attacks of narcolepsia identical to that mentioned above. His vision remains on the average much weakened, but with rather marked oscillations. At one time the patient will seem to perceive nothing but luminous stimuli and is easily dazzled, at another he identifies correctly the objects that are put before him. The pulmonary condition grew worse and it was with all the symptoms of phthisis in a bronchopneumonial form that the patient succumbed on 17th February 1917.

In the course of the autopsy we discovered the existence of a clearly fluctuating retro-chiasmatic tumefaction of a violaceous coloration. The hypophysis was normal, as was the turcic seat. It did not appear compressed, and a section of the pituitary stem did not release the liquid contained in the tumour. The latter occupied the interpeduncular space, pushing sideways the two cerebral peduncles, pushing back on the mamillary bodies and forward on the chiasmus and the optic fascia, whose inner portion was visibly flattened.

On the frontal profiles of the hemispheres the relationship of the tumour to the ventricular walls appears clearly.

This tumour, in section, is seen to be formed of a definable membrane distinct from the ependymary wall, forming a closed cavity, independent of the ventricle it fills, and divided by partitions. From the secondary

cavities thus formed runs in some cases a clear liquid and in others one which is positively hæmorrhagic in nature. At the very base of this cystous tumour the internal membrane is studded with hard, irregular nodules.

A histological examination carried out by Mademoiselle Soyez (Germaine) told us something as to the nature of this tumour. It is, in fact, a cystous epithelial tumour developed at the expense of the lining of the third ventricle. The nodules protruding into the cavity are formed of loose conjunctive or nervous tissue which is a continuation of the sub-ependymary parietal tissue encased in an epithelium in a progressive state of epitheliomatous proliferation.

The tumour thus distends the third ventricle, pushing the optical layers apart, but above all it causes a thinness of the lower section of the ventricle, the infundibulum and the terminal lamella, leaving, however, the hypophysis quite intact. The latter's protective membrane appears not even to have been impinged upon. The lateral ventricles are slightly distended. Nowhere was there any sign of meningitic or vascular modifications.

III MORAVAGNE'S MANUSCRIPTS

(v) The Year 2013

Moravagine's manuscripts were handed over to me after his death. They were contained in a trunk with a false bottom. The secret compartment contained a Pravaz syringe; the trunk itself, a heap of manuscript pages in utter disorder.

These are written on bits of paper of every shape and kind. They are written in German, French and Spanish. There are two large bundles and thousands of scraps in no order whatsoever.

The first bundle is entitled, *The Year 2013*. It contains the historical, social and economic effects that resulted for us Humans from the first contacts established with the planet Mars, as well as the story of the first voyage there and the beginning of those contacts. The tale is a disconnected one. This study is, alas, incomplete and leaves certain lacunae which I have not been able to bridge. Moravagine never spoke freely about the time he had spent on Mars.

The Manuscript of *The Year 2013* is subdivided into three quite distinct parts.

First Part : a lyrical piece entitled :

The Earth, 2nd August, 1914.

Second Part : a long narrative in seven chapters entitled as follows :

Chapter I : The Great War of 1914-2013.

Chapter II : A Sketch of the World Situation
in the 99th Year of the War. (War of the
League of Nations.)

Chapter III : From a Neutral Country.

Chapter IV : The Story of Two Deserters.

Chapter V : Concerning Certain New Devices and Methods for Use in War.

Chapter VI : Influence of Martian Kultur on Human Civilization.

Chapter VII : The Why of the War.

Third Part : a lyrical piece entitled :

Mars, 2nd August, 2013.

This manuscript is signed : by *Moravagine, an Idiot.*

(w) The End of the World

The second bundle of Moravagine's manuscripts is entitled *The End of the World*. Though entirely written in his hand, I have never been able to establish whether this scenario was a work of the imagination or whether, on the contrary, my friend had not in fact taken the trouble to collate the material for me on a cinema programme during his mysterious stay on the Planet Mars. Knowing my curiosity about things celestial Moravagine established for my use a dictionary of the 200,000 principal meanings of the only word in the Martian language. This word was an onomatope: the grating of a rough-crystal stopper. The Martians live in a gaseous state as if poised within a flask, as Moravagine explained to me during our final talk a week before he died. It is this dictionary which has made it possible for me to translate or rather adapt the Martian scenario. I have charged Blaise Cendrars with the responsibility of seeing to its publication and perhaps even its production as a film.

This manuscript is not signed. It was addressed to me in an envelope, and the address was my lodging in Chartres.

(x) The Only Word in the Martian Language

The only word in the Martian language is written phonetically :

Kay-ray-kuh-kuh-ko-kex.

It means whatever you want it to mean.

(y) An Unpublished Page from
Moravagine's MSS. His Signature.
His Portrait.

Here is a sample page, unpublished, by Moravagine:



Hydrogen photographic source

Entpus i. decept, a com-
munity. he is suppose.

•.u. - how go out now
that's so sad we eat

— 1 —

De segui un'antica
storia della marcia di
Giovanni da pochi i anni
de rete.

P.S. (Young man, consider the aridity
of these tragic, facetious pages. Do not
47² and N.B.! forget that when the heart petrifies
there is no progress. All
science must be
like a fruit, so ordered that it
may hang from a tree
of flesh and ripen
in the sunlight of passion.
Histology, photography, electric
bells, telescopes, birds,
amperes, smoothing irons,
etc.—this is only good for
bouncing off the arse of hu-
manity.

Thy face moves me in
another way, wet with
tears and on the verge of excruciating
laughter.)

Herewith, as a matter of curiosity, is the facsimile of his signature :



And here, finally, is his portrait which we owe to the pencil of Conrad Moricand. Moricand met Moravagine once, at the Café de la Rotonde.



(z) Epitaph

You may read upon a tombstone in the military cemetery of Sainte Marguerite Island the following inscription traced in indelible pencil :

HERE LIES AN ALIEN

Postface

In 1925 I wrote, in the Preface to *Moravagine* : '... In the Isle de France country there is an old steeple. Below the steeple, a little house. In this house, an attic under lock and key. Behind the locked door, a trunk with a secret compartment. In the false bottom there is a Pravaz syringe; in the trunk itself, manuscripts' And I concluded : 'I will not go on with this Preface, for the present book itself is a preface, a too-long preface to the *Complete Works of Moravagine* which I shall publish one day, but which I have not yet had time to put in order. This is why the manuscripts will continue to lie in the trunk with the false bottom, the trunk in the attic, the attic under lock and key, in the little house, at the foot of the old steeple, in a little village in the Isle de France, until I, Blaise Cendrars, no longer prowl about the world among the many lands and books and men'

I went back there the other day after twelve years of absence.

The house was empty.

It was still the same house. The second war had passed that way. My little country house had been pillaged. Of the 25,000 books it contained I've been able to rescue barely two or three thousand, and in what condition ! Filthy, torn and tattered !

But that's the least of it. The worst is that Moravagine's trunk with the false bottom has disappeared, and I shall never, never be able to put his papers in order or publish his *Complete Works*, not even his *The Year 2013* that

premonitory anticipation of the atomic era or modern Apocalypse.

But even this is nothing. The real shame is that all my files had been emptied, or rather dumped out the windows, and the floor of every room and even the earth of the garden were covered with a thick layer of dirty papers.

Thus I was able to rescue from the dung-heap the handful of notes you have just read, from among countless papers and manuscripts that were smeared to the point of illegibility.

But even this is not the height of my ignominy. The indelible injury is that each of these rescued pages bears the imprint of the hobnailed boots of the German police, who trampled over everything—everything!—even on the one and only photo of my mother that remained to me, which I discovered in the garden, buried in mud! . . .

Blaise Cendrars

Paris

20th September 1951